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MEMORIES & OPINIONS

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MEMORIES & OPINIONS

An unfinished autobiography

by

Q

Edited, with an introduction, by

S. C. ROBERTS

CAMBRIDGE
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INTRODUCTION

I

'There ain't going to be no Reminiscences, never—never. You're the second kind friend this fortnight to hint at such a book in view of my approaching demise.'

So wrote Q to me on 30 July 1930. But publishers have a way of returning to the attack and Q's mind was too liberal and too humane to be incapable of change; on 27 February 1936 he wrote:

'I shall have to "perpend" a bit, before I can think out any way of writing such a book as you suggest. For (you will not have noticed it!) I am really rather modest, and it won't be easy to write Reminiscences without what someone (MacColl, I think) once called an indecent exposure of one's personality. So don't talk to the Syndics just yet. I'll think it over in the Easter Vac.'

The process of 'perpending' was favourable and an agreement was eventually signed in March 1938.

M. R. James has recorded how, in similar circumstances, he procured pencil and paper and how difficult he found it to make a beginning. 'Then', he continues, 'when the pencil had begun to run along the lines, the doubt was whether I should ever be able to stop it.'

It was far otherwise with Q. For all his experience and competence as a journalist, his pen—always a pen, and a steel one at that—did not run rapidly along the lines. 'I have made one or two shots', he wrote in October 1937, 'at a book of "Memories" and cannot find the target. The anecdotage was piffle; and as soon as I start "telling my inside" gray-cyed Athene tugs me off it by the hair.... But I think I am working out a new way, in a *short* book.'

And in July 1939:

'In the intervals... I write almost daily a paragraph or

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so for "Memories and Opinions". So the atoll climbs slowly out of a sea of troubles.'

Paragraph by paragraph the chapters grew, and always with a characteristic care for the *mot juste*. At the time of Q's death only four were completed and the curtain was rung down on the prologue with the words:

'I...there set out a quire of virgin folio paper, and sat down to write the first chapter of my first novel.'

An ending so finished to an unfinished composition might seem too good to spoil. Yet, when the manuscript of a portion of the fifth chapter was found at Fowey, not finally revised, but embellished with many 'second thoughts', it seemed foolish not to incorporate it with the rest, and the narrative ends, therefore, not with the inception, but with the publication, of *Dead Man's Rock*.

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That was in 1887. *The Astonishing History of Troy Town* appeared in the next year, to be followed by the long series of novels and short stories, the poems, grave and gay, the literary criticism, and, in 1900, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Of the 25 years from 1887 we shall never have the full and authentic record. Fragments of it may be found in such books as *From a Cornish Window* or *News from the Duchy* and occasionally, when in company with an old friend like Charles Whibley, Q would be led to talk of Fleet Street and Soho in the nineties—of Barrie's passion for press-cuttings or of Henley's nicknames for Edmund Gosse.

By 1912 Q had completed *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* and the dedication page heralded a new epoch: *To my future friends and pupils at Cambridge, this propitiatory wreath*. The King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature at Cambridge had been founded in 1910. There was then no school of English in the University and the first holder of the chair had been one of the most brilliant and adventurous classics of his generation, A. W. Verrall.

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When he was succeeded by one who was primarily known as a novelist and anthologist, classical dons raised their eyebrows. Perhaps Q's inaugural lecture, delivered in January 1913, may have reassured them a little; opening with a reference to Plato's dialogue *The Laws*, it was in the direct line of classical tradition:

'Suffer me, Mr Vice-Chancellor and Gentlemen, before reaching my text, to remind you of the characteristically beautiful setting. The place is Crete, and the three interlocutors—Cleinius a Cretan, Megillus a Lacedaemonian, and an Athenian stranger—have joined company on a pilgrimage to the cave and shrine of Zeus....'

But the professor's duty was not only to deliver lectures but 'otherwise to promote, so far as may be in his power, the study in the University of the subject of English literature'. So, before long, three interlocutors—H. F. Stewart, H. M. Chadwick, and Q himself—joined company on a pilgrimage which led to the foundation of the English Tripos in 1917. There was, as Q records, some stiff opposition, especially from a critical section of the English Association; but the proposals for the new Tripos were eventually carried without a vote. The first class list, published in 1919, was, of course, a small one, but in 1920 and 1921 it had grown to greater length. Many of those who came to Cambridge straight from active service seized eagerly the opportunity of the serious study of the great writers of English and the names of G. B. Harrison, J. B. Priestley, Frank Kendon and Gerald Bullett are to be found in the early lists. With such undergraduates about him Q was especially happy. At the beginning of the war he had been a member of the M.A. platoon of the C.U.O.T.C. and wrote of 'the mud on the road to the Rifle Butts, where the M.A. warriors of the C.U.O.T.C. drill and improve their waists, though they may never serve their country'; in fact, Q served his country as a recruiting officer in Cornwall and at the very end of the war he lost his only son.

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III

Q's first volume of lectures was published at the University Press in 1916 under the title *On the Art of Writing* and was welcomed as keenly by readers as by listeners. From 1918 to 1925 he served as a Syndic of the Press, and from 1922, when I became Secretary, I quickly grew to familiarity with the lecture scripts, every one of them marked with punctilious care for emphasis, accent and pause. Passionate Oxonian as he was, Q developed an affectionate loyalty towards his Cambridge College and towards certain Cambridge institutions. As his own narrative shows, Charles Cannan, sometime Secretary to the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, was for him an incomparable figure; but when he came to write the preface to his *Oxford Book of English Prose* in 1925, he coupled with Cannan's name that of my predecessor, A. R. Waller. 'I like to think', he wrote, 'that, when my time comes in turn, I shall survive in the Oxford Books of English Verse and English Prose along with these two good men.'

Q's work for the University Press was not confined to the publication of his lectures in book form. In 1923 he was co-opted as a member of a Committee of the Cambridgeshire Education authority appointed to prepare a syllabus of religious teaching. Out of this syllabus grew a scheme of books containing selections from the Scriptures—*The Children's Bible* and *The Little Children's Bible*. Q's fellow-editors were Alexander Nairne and T. R. Glover. 'I told him [Glover] the other day', Q wrote, 'that I had regarded myself throughout this business as the pure white leaf in the Bible dividing the Old and New Testaments. He was pleased...but I wonder which Dispensation he supposed me to be assigning to *him*.'

When the books were published, they were made available in various styles of binding, some of them peculiar to the by-ways of the bible trade. The announcement of this

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wide range of choice tickled Q's fancy and I received the following rhyme on a post-card from Fowey:

'The Children's Bible
In this climate is li'ble
In 'Cloth Limp'
To be damp as a shrimp;
'Cloth Boards'
No protection affords
Against water spilt.
Even less, Cloth Gilt.
'Pluviusin'
Lets J. Pluvius in.
Moroccoette
6s. net...will yet
let wet get
Thro' to the text.
Wherefore, O perplexed
And Christian friend,
The Syndics recommend
POLISHED LEATHER
DEFIES EVERY WEATHER.'

From which it may be seen that the former editor of *The Oxford Magazine* still lived on in the Professor.

Another Cambridge project with which Q was associated was *The New Shakespeare*. The plan was Waller's and it was part of the plan that Q should write an introduction to each play. Before the comedies were finished, Q had serious trouble with his eyes; in October 1924 he wrote to me:

'You will scarcely guess it from this page—for they say I still write legibly—but my eyes in these last 2 or 3 months have gone rapidly to grief and new glasses don't help me to read print...We'll talk over the prospect, which of course affects Shakespeare and Bible as well as myself (pretty trio!).

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‘The thing *may* be curable. Any way I’ve had a good time.’

Happily the thing *was* curable; but when the last of the comedies had been completed, Q resigned his share, though not his interest, in *The New Shakespeare*. His co-editor, Dover Wilson, in the dedication of his edition of *Hamlet*, paid affectionate tribute to ‘twelve years of unclouded fellowship’.

IV

In Cambridge memories, there must linger many and varied pictures of Q: there was the professorial figure clad, literally, in a wedding-garment in preparation for the lecture-room; there was the figure of the countryman, in tweeds, strolling into the Pitt Club for lunch; there was the Commodore’s figure, ready to spend an afternoon with the Cruising Club; there was the post-prandial figure in his rooms at Jesus, dispensing good talk, good liquor and good fellowship to his guests. And at the back of it all was the sense of style, a sense which governed his dress and his manners as surely as his writing.

It was, indeed, for his championship of cleanness and grace of style that Q would best wish to be remembered. Among the quotations in his inaugural lecture was Lucian’s description of his friend Demonax:

‘His way was like other people’s; he mounted no high horse; he was just a man and a citizen. He indulged in no Socratic irony. But his discourse was full of Attic grace....’

For Q, the cultivation of a clean style was no cloistered virtue. The man of letters had a duty to perform in the forum as well as in the study. Those of us who knew him only in Cambridge were, perhaps, not fully aware of his contribution to the civic life of his beloved Duchy, where he was County Councillor and Alderman, Justice of the Peace and, later, Mayor of Fowey. ‘It used to be a sight’, wrote one of his

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obituarists¹, 'to watch him striding up the hill from Truro Station ready for the fray at the County Hall. Always he could be counted upon to champion the cause of a poor but promising scholar....' It was a cause that was not forgotten when the County Alderman returned to the shelter of academic bowers. In the preface to his second volume of lectures (*On the Art of Reading*) he wrote:

'Though it be well worth while to strive that the study of English shall take an honourable place among the Schools of a great University, it is not in our Universities that the general redemption of English will be won.... *The real battle for English lies in our Elementary Schools and in the training of our Elementary Teachers.*'

When Q said of Johnson that 'he never saw literature but as a part of life', he might well have been speaking of himself. It was not 'pure' poetry but 'the place of poetry in a well-ordered Commonwealth' that engaged his vital interest; and when an eminent poet and critic referred to contemporary society as 'worm-eaten with Liberalism', Q was roused to defend with unwonted passion the tradition of Liberty, 'the ark within the citadel of our fathers' souls'. It was the counterblast not of a professor but of a citizen, just a man and a citizen—but his discourse was full of Attic grace.

S. C. R.

August, 1944

¹ R. G. B. in *The Methodist Recorder*.

I

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I

My grandfather, Jonathan Couch of Polperro, a small fishing town on the south-east coast of Cornwall, lived all his days there as a medical man. He came of native seafaring stock, one of whom (whose parentage I have been unable to trace) served as First Lieutenant on H.M.S. *Conqueror* at Trafalgar; and another, a Lieutenant Edward Couch, as mate of the *Erebus*, accompanied Sir John Franklin on his last expedition and shared his fate.

But this Jonathan, son of the youngest of twelve brothers, and the sole home-keeping one, was an only child, born when his parents were advanced in years, the father fifty, the mother forty-five. With what care a precocious boy would be diverted from seafaring, in which so many of the race and locality had perished, as why he was destined for one of the learned professions, admits no wide conjecture. A grammar-school education, with a good grounding in Latin by the domestic chaplain of a good neighbour—Sir Harry Trelawny of Trelawne—preceded his pupilage under a respectable physician of Looe, where he combined his studies with service as Second Lieutenant in the Looe Volunteer Artillery, one of the many corps raised on the breaking of the Peace of Amiens, to train against Napoleon's threat to invade us. From Looe he proceeded to London, to his medical course at the (then united) Hospitals of Guy's and St Thomas's. In a letter to his parents he writes home proudly, 'Mr Cooper, our

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surgeon, is the first surgeon in the world'. This Mr Cooper, I scarcely need say, survives in fame as Sir Astley.

His London studies completed and his qualifications obtained, he returned to his home, which he never quitted save for brief holidays. Many wondered why a man, of high skill in his profession and so eminent in pursuing the master-passion of his life, should have chosen the *fallentis semita vitae* of an obscure fishing town. Yet a descendant, who in some measure has sought and found a like privacy, can find excuse. In the first place, he was an only and devoted son, of aged and devoted parents—his father hopelessly palsied, his mother decrepit. It would seem, further, that his native scene had bound a spell upon him which, boy or man, he could neither escape, nor even resist. Towards the end he prefixed to his *History of Polperro* Ovid's

Nescio qua natale solum dulcedine cunctos
Ducit et immemores non sinit esse sui

—for him an under-statement, and, as such, characteristic. But, above all, Polperro provided a constant food for those observations and recordings of natural phenomena which were his long life's intense pursuit and his unselfish reward.

For he was a born naturalist, by habit of mind as by local circumstance sealed, if I may put it so, of the tribe of Gilbert White of Selborne; which is to say that he kept a speculative mind under strictest discipline of minutely recorded fact. A list of his pamphlets and contributions to various learned Societies would fill some pages, and his correspondence with Yarrell, Bewick and other naturalists many more.¹ He kept accurate journals of his observations in the geology, the fauna, the flora, of his district, and trained many disciples up and down the coast. One of them, the late William Pengelly, F.R.S., famous for his

¹ See the *Dict. of National Biography*: also a Memoir of him prefixed by my father to the *History of Polperro* (Truro, 1871), and another, *Life of Jonathan Couch, F.L.S.*, by Bertha Couch (Liskeard, 1891).

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exploration of Kent's Hole by Torquay with its relics of primitive man, once shook my childish hand with 'My boy, I learned more of your grandfather than of any man or book'. But his main line of research lay in ichthyology, material for which would come almost daily to his door, often to the dismay of a household as scrupulously clean as its master in his person. For, instructed by him, the fishermen of Polperro would bring anything unusual taken by their nets, and he kept a small apparatus of his invention—a stand which held the specimen while a jet of salt water played upon it and he with rapid brush, being a competent water-colourist, transferred to paper the evanescent brilliance of the creature before proceeding to dissect it under the magnifying glass. These drawings illustrate his *magnum opus*, the *History of the Fishes of the British Islands* (in four volumes, 1862–5), which continues a classic. In an old folio intermixed with the original water-colours are hundreds of small drawings, minutely executed, of almost every bone, joint, or section of marine fish and birds. Among various other relics I possess of his activities I may mention here a short pioneer book *Illustration of Animal Instinct*, a manuscript treatise *On Dreams*, and some scattered papers—all these indicating a range of speculation, from star to flower, which, as a servant of knowledge, pending exact evidence he kept to himself. Also I have in three volumes a translation by him, for the 'Wernerian Club', of Pliny's *Natural History*, based on the old version by Philemon Holland but pruned by my grandfather's more rigid Latinity.

He married, in early middle age, Jane Quiller,¹ daughter of a race of seamen who, although said to be of French extraction, had been residents in Polperro for at least five generations. All her male kinsmen had been lost at sea.

¹ The derivation of the name 'Quiller' is uncertain but most likely Breton. 'Couch' is pure Cornish, *coch* signifying 'red', and is properly pronounced as 'Cooch' never 'Cowch'. On many old tombstones it is inscribed as 'Couche'.

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Her own father, Richard Quiller, had sailed with his elder brother John in command of an armed merchant ship under Government orders, and had perished with the whole crew, homeward bound, in a gale off Teneriffe. This befell in 1812. The widows survived but a short while, and my grandfather, on his marriage with Jane, moved into the deserted home of the Quillers—a huddled house of all contrariwise roofs and chimneys at an angle of the bridge. Often threatened with demolition, it survives to this day as 'Couch's house'. From its front door patients would be turned to a narrow backway because a garden spider had chosen to spin in the porch and the female must not be disturbed in her questionable career. Indoors by various levels past the living rooms and the doctor's study one climbed to a largish bedroom fitted with a wig-cupboard; in the floor were removable boards revealing a hole, in the past equally convenient (it was rumoured) for a fugitive from the press-gang or for storing a few kegs of smuggled brandy. On a beam of the old house hung a key which no one dared to touch, since Richard Quiller, Jane's father, had hung it there, the key of his quadrant, before starting on his last voyage, with strong injunctions that no one should take it off the nail until his return; and there it hung until by some later tenant, not of our family, it was taken down, swept away, or lost.

My grandmother, Jane Couch, died (1857) at the age of sixty-six in this house wherein she had lived her whole life; and it is more than probable that her birth and death were in the same room. She had borne to my grandfather a daughter, Margaret Quiller, who survived her but a few months, and five sons, one of whom died in infancy. To three of the surviving sons and to his daughter he had given at baptism, in pious affection for her, his wife's cognomen for second name—Richard Quiller, Thomas Quiller (my father) and John Quiller. Jonathan, the fourth (second in order of birth), being epileptic, was kept at home. The others he himself trained in medicine and sent up

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successively to his own Hospital of Guy's, where all did creditably. Richard, the eldest, settled as a practitioner at Penzance, and died prematurely of blood-poisoning (through a nailspring unguarded in an operation), but not before earning his place beside his father in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (q.v. for both) as a brilliant young naturalist. Of Thomas I shall speak in my next section. John followed Richard to Penzance where he lived and died a bachelor and an estimable general practitioner.

But this section concerns my grandfather, whose long life was singular enough, I think, to warrant this account. A proud man, stiff in his Methodist ancestry, he strode his domain as its unchallengeable great man, in top-hat, high white stock, long black coat, and until past middle age, black breeches and silver-buckled shoes—a costume which forfeited no dignity as he would sit, after his wont, on an inverted fish-basket by the quay, with brush and paint-box ready and the eye of an osprey on the nets, should perchance they discharge something rare, however minute.

As a doctor his care for the sick was exemplary and taken for granted by all (often without reward), as his efforts to improve the conditions of his people and to safeguard the fishermen's lives never ceased. For a single instance, it was he who conceived the building of the 'Duke of Cornwall's' pier on the east side of the little haven, prepared plans, made one of his infrequent visits to London to convince the Government, and after a long fight as Chairman of Committee saw its foundation laid on September 5th, 1861. Amid these local concerns he kept the even tenor of his chosen seclusion, gratified, no doubt, by many medals received from learned Societies, more by a constant exchange of correspondence with English and foreign naturalists and the entertainment of some eminent man who found his way down into Cornwall (then beyond railways) to visit him. Perhaps, after all, this imperfect

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sketch of mine may be best illustrated by two opposed extracts from his own journals:

(1) 1848, *June 20*. I received a visit from Mr Alfred Tennyson, the Poet. He came into Cornwall along the North Coast, and from about Camelford crossed over to Fowey, where I called upon him on the 19th. He came to Polperro in a boat with Mr Peach and others, and after viewing the scenery in all directions and taking tea at our house they all rowed back to Fowey late in the evening. I found him well-informed and communicative, I believe good Greek with some knowledge of Hebrew. His personal appearance is not prepossessing, having a slouch in his gait and rather slovenly in his dress, though his clothes were new and good. He confessed to this. He admired the wildness of our scenery, deprecated the breaking in of improvements, as they are called. He inquired after traditions, especially of the great Arthur: his object in visiting the County being to collect materials for a poem on that Chief. But he almost doubted his existence. He showed me a MS. sketch of a history of the Hero: but it was prolix and modern.

(2) 1861, *September 5th*. I have this day attended the birth of a child, who is the latest of six generations I have known intimately on the father's and mother's side, and four of these generations I have attended in childbirth.

In 1858, at the age of sixty-nine, to the surprise of the place, he married again. His new wife, a good-looking Polperro girl of twenty-two, by name Sarah Roose, justified her adventure by twelve years of devoted affection faithfully returned. She bore him three daughters—and thereby, incidentally, provided me with three estimable aunts of more or less my own tender age.

My father (I believe, alone of the elder family) accepted this justification as quite unanswerable; and my sole recollection of the old man in person is of a filial visit to which I was taken at the age of four or thereabouts. He had recovered from a recent illness, but welcomed us at the porch stiff and erect as was his habit. Though actually of middle height, he seemed to me incredibly tall, and taller yet when he laid a hand on my head and solemnly blessed me.

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He died on April 13th, 1870, after a brief attack of bronchitis, of which he made no more than usual. Having dispatched some scientific correspondence after breakfast, he read his newspaper, then turned to doze, and so died quietly in his sleep. My father drove me down to the funeral, a child of seven; and my recollections of that day have stayed by me as a series of snapshots, disconnected but vivid—of our mare, Jessie, stumbling on the precipitous road, of the stablemen at the foot of the hill examining her knee and applying a cobweb, of my youngest uncle ('black John') silhouetted against a bow-window in a friend's house where the mourners were assembled, and behind his shoulders the shining water and the boats all gay with flags (at which I wondered, but they were half-masted, of course): then a long line of fishermen, with sashes across their blue jerseys, drawn up at attention while the coffin, to avoid the narrow stairs, was lowered from a window: after that the stuffiness of a funeral coach (I can smell it yet) as we crawled up an interminable hill, at a point of which, as the horses paused to draw breath, someone pointed out to me a fine chestnut tree planted by my grandfather over a well he had opened and dedicated; and so by zigzags up to a graveyard on the hill's very summit, flanked by the whitewashed chapel of Mabel Burrow, for once in its forlorn history crowded to the hedges. With that the curtain of memory drops upon flashes as true (I am told) as they were vivid and lasting. But it lifts upon another which, equally vivid, must be pure hallucination—of being driven home by a route easier for the mare's hurt, and of being aroused from drowsiness by my father pointing out that the heath-road on either hand shone ahead and astern of our carriage lamps with innumerable glow-worms. Now this is incredible; for, though that Easter Monday had been hot out of all season, I doubt if glow-worms ever show their wooing-lights so early in England. Yet this vision connects itself with the others of the day, closing them, and I must leave it at that.

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I may end this with a small postscript relating to the burial ground, since all concerned in the story are now dead, including the culprit, my uncle Jonathan. He was, as I have told, epileptic in infancy and therefore kept at home. He grew to a man of stature and considerable strength, but 'touched in the head', or, as we put it in the west, 'not exactly'; withal he was of the gentlest disposition, save on the slightest fancied disparagement of his father or family, of whose dignity he conceived himself the heir and trustee. But these occasions were of the rarest, and not only because they provoked a wrath as formidable as it was sudden, but in virtue of old loyalties and his own habitual courtesy towards all. He lived his days happily enough (unmarried of course) on a frugal allowance, and only once came near to serious trouble.

The obelisk over my grandfather's grave stands in a corner of that windy eminence to leeward of some pines that hardly maintain life against the south-westerly gales. My uncle Jonathan one day, paying a pious visit there, was seized with indignation at the neglect of the shrine and—the place being deserted—dug or tore up the likeliest shrubs he could find among those consecrated to the dead and transplanted them around the obelisk and coping. The sacrilege was discovered, denounced, and in a short while compassionately overlooked.

II

'Thomas is one of the best fellows that ever lived; you can trust him if all the rest of the world fails.'

My grandfather left this private record—dated, I guess, when his late marriage had met with disfavour by all but Thomas of his older family and others. I like to think of it as my father's true epitaph.

He followed his brother Richard to Guy's and duly qualified in surgery and medicine; in surgery, indeed, so creditably that a hospital appointment awaited him. But after a struggle the ties of home drew him back to Cornwall

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and he settled in Bodmin as a general practitioner. Many have told me, while he lived and since, that his presence in a sick-chamber filled it 'with a confidence that was half a cure'. But some of his friends maintained that the delicacy of his hand in surgery had, for his own advancement in life or at any rate for fame, been better employed in painting; in which his amateur work combined precision with an individual grace.¹ He was no mean naturalist either; but in his later years gave their small leisure more and more to the study of Cornish antiquities, folklore, dialect. He arranged and edited his father's MSS. of the *History of Polperro*, adding chapters on its natural history, the manners and customs of its people, etc.; published a Glossary of the Cornwall dialect at once accurate and concise; his fugitive contributions to *Notes and Queries* and other antiquarian journals would fill a volume or two of pertinent matter.

Early in 1863 he married Mary, only daughter and (in genealogical terms) sole heiress of Elias and Theophila Ford, of Abbotskerswell, South Devon. Of these grandparents and their influence on my life I shall speak later. Of the marriage I was born on November 21st, 1863. Two daughters followed at intervals of something over a year; much later two boys, who do not come into the nursery story.

My mother, as I remember her (and old gossips have confirmed this), was an exceedingly attractive woman; with a wonderful wealth of red-auburn hair, dark eyebrows and a Devon complexion of cream and roses which indeed she kept to the end of her days. To me—and in her way to my sisters—she was endlessly affectionate. I thought her the most beautiful being in the world, and adored her.

But she had been an only child, and had no conception of a purse as fathomable. She was ever wildly generous, less for herself than for anyone in distress; but (I fear,

¹ A few of the illustrations in the *History of British Fishes* are his, drawn for the work in vacation times at home.

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looking back) wildly extravagant, to my easy-going father's frequent distress—as it must have been, though he kept silence, and the consequence only dawned upon us three children by degrees. I can recall early visions of our large drawing-room with waxed floors and girandoles lit for dancing, of the dining-room too, its table piled with fruit and flowers at Sunday luncheons to which I was allowed to 'come down for dessert', to sit by my mother in a suit of velvet. In later years a large room beyond the drawing-room—it had once opened on my first glittering vision of a Christmas Tree—declined into a seldom used guest-chamber with presses in which my mother's old ball-dresses, of sprigged silk, reposed for ever, and a cupboard in which the metal girandoles lay rusting.

But these two rooms enclose a better story. Across the road stood a house allotted by the Wesleyan body to its Ministers as their turn came, and to a succession of these with their families it had proved a malignant, sometimes a deadly, residence. My father—we were 'Church of England'—had attended none of these professionally, the Wesleyans of the town in those days being clannish, preferring to recommend (at any rate to their Minister) a doctor of their own connexion. At length he was called in, to find the Minister, a Mr Hill, and his wife near at death's door with typhoid; and their daughter, a beautiful young woman, past all hope of recovery. My father went back, and in an hour or so our drawing-room and the other of which I have spoken were turned into a hospital, the parents carried across in ambulance, and the pair nursed back to health after many weeks, my mother almost their sole attendant—for in those days there was no such thing as a trained nurse to be had or hired. It enhanced this service that for the while my elder sister and I were removed to a neighbouring boarding-school, to make room for domestic use of the day nursery—my younger sister (as ill fortune would have it) being stricken with some childish fever at the time. The illness and convalescence of

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our guests lasted some months, and they insisted on acknowledging their stay with the gift of a roan cob (on which in time I took my first riding lessons and hazards over banks). The Wesleyans followed this up by presenting my mother with a salver and a handsome Bible.

Another of her generous impulses, of which, to do her justice, she (if not we) endured the consequences without flinching to the end, brought into the family circle an old school friend who had come to wreck. The secret of this we never learned nor asked. But Miss O—, though a rigidly pious governess and addicted to moral reproof, had, I should guess, as impossible an outfit for understanding or teaching children as any woman on earth. Her method in the school-room was to open a book—whether it were *Reading without Tears*, *Whittaker's* or *Little Arthur's History of England*, the Multiplication Table, or *The Child's Guide to Knowledge*—mark off a page or so and command this to be recited, after time given for perusal, by rote—not a word omitted. As a boy and mutinous, I soon kicked against this, and was set to read aloud—of all choices amid Scott's novels—a chapter at a time from *St Ronan's Well*, while Miss O— tatted and my sisters conned their tasks. After a short endurance of this, of Miss O—'s botanical walks too, and of copying her pietistic efforts in water-colour—a succession of Crosses in dark sepia, with lilies at the foot and a text in gilt scraped from a shell—I mutinied, and was sent to a neighbouring school attended by young ladies between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, myself the only male, and admitted in an hour to which I look back with gratitude which compels me to write their names—Miss Harriet and Miss Jemina Lutman. Miss Harriet taught Latin and French, and after winning full marks by my first 'exercise'—*Balbus murum aedificat*, etc.—I went home as one baptised into a cult. I felt able (aged seven or so) to look my father in the face almost as initiated man to man! Miss Jemina—gaunt, far taller than her frail sister and possessed of a manly contralto which she

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used on Sundays with effect in the Church choir—taught arithmetic, Euclid, some history, and geography with the use of globes. In Euclid I suppose her teaching to have been singular; as, after the first few problems, it certainly became extensive, growing to occupy a long table with sheets of complicated diagrams in a sort of multiplied lacework drawn by ruler and compasses: for, however much Euclid might take as proved, Miss Jemina insisted that each step must be conveyed into the next with an interior spider-web of diagrams. The method was drastic but thorough (as the reader may easily conceive). I seem to remember that something (whether the extent of the table, the supply of cartridge paper, or the exhaustion of alphabets for initials) gave out before No. 47 in Book 1, at which point I left for a school away from home. I cannot certainly tell: but this I can, that I arrived there far better grounded in Latin, French, Euclid and even arithmetic (my life-long abhorrence) than the boys of thirteen and fourteen in whose form the Headmaster placed me.

Soon after our parting at a farewell feast (which my young sisters attended in muslin and ribbons), these two excellent ladies left Bodmin to reside near Exeter: whence, many years later (on the occasion of some small success), I received a most charming letter, to which in these days I often recur in thought and some contrition.

As the family affluence sank or had been consumed, we children, while not realising, insensibly adapted our play to it, with our play's appliances. A chest of drawers in the nursery became our coach, four chairs harnessed with string our four-horse team. We played at Swiss Family Robinson with a broken ladder and storehouse in the fork of a sycamore at the garden's end; or we shared out our remaining biscuit (women and children first) on a broken cucumber-frame in mid-Atlantic. We saved up our pennies to buy a toy theatre (price one shilling), cut out the cardboard figures and scenery and gave domestic performance of *Blue Beard* and *The Corsican Brothers*; always with a

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finale of red fire—the ingredients borrowed somehow from my father's surgery—and the gratifying stench which I can smell to this day; for I have this one thing in common with Shakespeare, that my sense of smell has ever been a gift to rival his!

There were two annual events upon which we looked forward and back with a fearful joy and, while it lasted, enjoyed the first to delirium. This was Christmas with its Tree (God bless the memory of Albert, Prince Consort!). In later life I quarrelled with my friend Andrew Lang for having added to Hans Andersen's beautiful story of *The Little Fir-Tree* in one of his 'Fairy Books' a note 'Here our Danish author ends. This is what people call *sentiment*, and I hope you enjoy it!'—*Ma sonties!* and a Scot rebuking sentiment! (but see *infra*).

I do not remember my sisters' presence at the first of these Christmas Trees—a very magnificent one, with a crowd of guests. Doubtless they were there; but I happened (aged six) to be preoccupied with love and jealousy. For many months my parents had been happy to entertain (in consequence, I believe, of some strained relations with her family) a young lady whose wooer, a Captain E., had brought her a Christmas gift, which she, in dissatisfaction, promptly threw at his head. Both parties being noted for passionate tempers, all looked for a violent scene, and I in my childish hope for final rupture. They were married some short while later, the bride insisting on a chaise with four greys and a couple of postillions. As the equipage rolled off I waved with the rest from the porch: but my little hankerchiefing was wet, and I fled back through the house to sob out my woe in the stable on the neck of our demure mare Jessie, friend of the family.

The apogee (as I may call it) of our domestic affluence—I hope this is pompous enough to match the end of the sentence—coincided with that of the Second Empire in France. I can fix the Christmas Tree of 1869 with recollection of wonderful crackers (sent down by Eugene

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Rimmel), of Offenbach (*Voici le Sabre*, etc.) in the drawing-room, of a volume of Hans Andersen from which, on Christmas morning, I was disengaged with difficulty for Church attendance. The next anniversary I can date with equal certainty (1870) by a magnificent box of leaden soldiers, French and Prussians, with a large champaign of cardboard set out with *mitrailleuses* from which—even so young a friend of France—I peppered the helmeted Prussians with volleys of dried peas.

Of 1872 I remember a Christmas day, when prone on the school-room floor, while my sisters played with weighing out articles from a toy General Store and laying out their purchases in a doll's house, I devoured, in a volume of Routledge's *Boys' Annual*, Jules Verne's *The English at the North Pole* and a serial story to me even more fascinating, *The Adventures of Johnny Ironside*, another translation from the French.¹ The title of the original would be, at a guess, *Jean Bras-de-Fer*, or something of the sort. A few years ago a friend F.B., sub-librarian, dug out a copy of this *Annual* for me from the cellars of the Cambridge University Library: and re-reading this domestic tale I found my elderly judgment applauding the fascination it had laid on the child. Written in the agony of defeat, it illustrated the indomitable scorn of France for her temporary victors.

We children enjoyed further, on the approach of summer, a lively break in the dull life of our country town. Every spring the Royal Cornwall Rangers Militia came up for training: and here I may quote from an old story of mine—*The Ship of Stars*—of which some of the earlier pages come very near to autobiography:

Suddenly one morning, in the height of the bird-nesting season, our Fore Street would swarm with countrymen tramping

¹ I have often wished that this story could be republished in book form. It dealt with the upbringing of a French boy of decent family, his aspirations and enlistment as a volunteer in the Franco-Prussian War, and included the betrayal of his hosts by a German spy-tutor: the whole written, on the morrow of 1870, in a spirit of patriotism, gallant and, where mournful, innocent of venom.

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up to the Barracks on the hill, and back with their bundles of uniform, unblackened boots dangling. For the next six weeks Bodmin would be full of bugle-calls, brass music, companies marching and parading in suits of rifle green, clanking officers in black, with little round forage-caps, frogged fatigue-jackets, silver badges on their side-belts, touches of 'royal' purple on cuff and collar; towards evening the long front of the upper town populous with men lounging and smoking, furbishing accoutrements or washing their bodies before the doors of their billets.

During these weeks my father, as surgeon of the regiment, wore the fatigue uniform described above: but for the final review had, all against his will, to adorn himself in full dress, and mount his mare, herself adorned with a magnificent saddle cloth of astrakhan. A cocked hat with a plume of black feathers topped all this, illustrating for us children a passage from *The Child's Guide to Knowledge, by a Lady* (p. 457, 48th edition), repeated by rote in the school-room:

Q. What bird furnishes military plumes?

A. That beautiful bird, the common cock of our farmyards: the long streamer feathers of his neck and back, and the stiffer ones of his tail, are formed by industrious females into a variety of elegant shapes, according to regimental regulations.

There were days, too, of rifle-practice at the butts on Cardinham moors (with the old heavy 'Snyder'), when between the firing, and while my father wandered off to search with his pocket microscope for bog plants, or to explore some moorland pool for fresh-water shells (concerning which he held some theory), stretched in the heather I listened to our veteran sergeant-major's tale of the Alma and Inkerman: nights also when, tired out by keeping homeward step with the soldiery's stride, I would pinch myself to keep awake until the bugler sounded the 'Last Post' beneath the turret clock at the street's end and the last notes lifted me, as on wings, into sleep.

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Bodmin, as 'County Town', had other local pomps with circumstance. Twice a year came the Judges of Assize in scarlet, with the Sheriff in uniform, and his Chaplain, and his coach, and his coachman and footman in powder and plush and silk stockings; and the javelin men and silver trumpets. Usually, too, Whitsun Fair fell at the height of the militia training: and then, for two days, booths and caravans, sweet-standings and shooting galleries lined the main street, and we children went out to choose amid the joys, our small silver burning in our pockets. There would be waxworks and marionettes by the Town Wall, a circus and maybe a menagerie at the town's end; but the travelling Theatre Royal pitched its canvas on Mount Folly—ancient and characteristically Cornish name for the site of the County's Halls of Justice—under the blank windows of which the legitimate drama, from *Othello* through *Ingomar*, Tobin's *Honeymoon*, *The Stranger*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *East Lynne*, and on Saturdays a Pantomime, held its own for two or three weeks beyond the rest of the Fair. The artistes of the Company (a family concern more or less) held my father in affection, partly because he would, when they came to borrow 'properties', bewilder them by gravely discussing how such and such a line of Shakespeare should have been rendered; but also, as I conjecture, for unpaid attendance on emergency, which sometimes happened when the stage villain—a capable actor, but addicted to drink—required a quick restorative before facing the audience. It may have been for this reason that we children occupied the reserved seats; these only distinguished from the back bench by a covering of carpet, and that of a peculiar kind, possibly of gipsy manufacture, which was peculiar to travelling shows and circuses, never to be found elsewhere. Thought-free at home, save in the school-room, we children would afterwards exchange dramatic criticism, and most severely, on the attempts at Pantomime; for apart from a nursery bookshelf of fairy tales, we had a run of our father's library, rich beyond

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common in poetry, romantic tales and folklore. I remember, for instance, my elder sister being led away protesting after a performance of *The Babes in the Wood*. She had read the story in *The Ingoldsby Legends* and wanted ocular satisfaction of the Wicked Uncle's punishment that

all that he swallowed turned acid.

But we were critical of Pantomime for a deeper reason. Annually our family visited Plymouth for the Christmas Pantomime at the old Theatre Royal, the journey itself being something of an adventure in those days, even for our stay-at-home elders. For the Cornwall Railway was itself a novelty, with its trestle viaducts spanning air, high over and alongside the lovely vale of the Fowey river; and then the marvel of Brunel's great bridge crossing Tamar. We had rooms in a hotel (Harvey's) with a small triangular garden of shrubs and statuary, where Lockyer Street descends to join the base of George Street, the proud centre of the town. Across Lockyer Street one looked on the noble façades of the Royal Hotel and the Theatre Royal itself. In George Street, dragged from loitering by *The Civet Cat* (a famous toy-shop), I would be dragged into a haberdasher's to be fitted with white-kid gloves to suit my black evening velveteens, while my elder sister has her lanky red hair 'frizzed' for the occasion. Then, after a dinner we could scarcely eat for excitement, we crossed the road and my father led us through the hotel by mysterious ways of which he seemed to command the key, and we emerged in a glare of light upon the theatre's interior: and here again I break off to quote a passage from *The Ship of Stars*. With some mix-up of chronology among memories long past separating, it translates my childish impressions accurately enough; and anyhow it brings relief to write for a while in the third person:

Faces, faces, faces—faces mounting from the pit below, up and up in tiers to the sky-blue ceiling whereon painted goddesses

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danced and scattered pink roses around the enormous prismatic chandelier. Fauns piping on the great curtain, fiddlers sawing in the orchestra, ladies in silks and jewels leaning over the gilt boxes opposite, officers in uniform behind them—Which were real, and which a vision only?...

I pause here to interject a small 'opinion', scarcely important enough to be worth numbering in my list. The gentry in those days habitually 'dressed' to attend the theatre: and, as it seems to me, the custom—besides being cleanly—paid a proper tribute to art; which asserts and should be acknowledged as deserving a sphere removed from the dingier occupations of every day. I have a notion that this observance was in some degree a mid-Victorian revival. It ante-dated, and perhaps suggested, the Hay-market innovation of pushing back the 'pit', consecrated in recollections of Charles Lamb and others, and reserving the better part of the auditorium's floor for the better dressed who paid higher; and I understand how easily this could be set down to snobbery. But there is another side to it. I would plead that, as a book postulates two courtesies, the reader's and the writer's, so a drama—on which a serious amount of care has been spent by many—should claim a decently correspondent observance from its audience; and further, that although an audience which cracked nuts and sucked oranges while Mrs Siddons enacted Lady Macbeth failed barbarously to give its due response to art, yet on the other hand the present fashion of eclipsing the auditorium in darkness to help 'realism' on the stage itself, shuts off that electric sympathy which stimulates an actor to play up to his best. I may be mistaken, but have a notion that this may partly account for the alleged decline nowadays of high impersonation and especially in careful enunciation of the spoken word with the thrill it can carry. In comedy, I am sure that, for the sake of 'realism', much enjoyment has been lost by sacrificing those merry monologues wherein (for example, in any play of Labiche's) the perplexed hero would step

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to the footlights and take everyone into his confidence. But I resume the story:

A bell rang, and the curtain rose to music upon a company of russet-brown elves dancing in a green wood. The play was *Jack the Giant Killer*; but Taffy, who knew the story in the book by heart, found it on the stage almost meaningless: That mattered nothing; it was the world, the new and unimagined world, stretching deeper and still deeper as the scenes were lifted—a world in which solid walls crumbled, and forests melted, and loveliness broke through the ruins, unfolding like a rose: it was this that seized a child's heart until he could have wept for its mere beauty.... It seemed that these bright beings on the stage had stepped over the ramparts into a country where everyone was happy and called to him to come and be happy too; and when Jack the Giant-killer changed to Jack and the Beanstalk, and when, in the Transformation Scene, a tall beanstalk grew and unfolded its leaves, and each leaf revealed a fairy seated, with lights flashing on star and jewelled wand, the longing became unbearable. The scene passed in a minute. The clown in pantaloons came on, and presently Sir Harry saw Taffy's shoulders shaking, and set it down to laughter at the harlequinade. He could not see the child's face.

At this point I falter and ask myself, 'Why go on when the bookstalls are overladen just now with autobiographies and confessions of very young men, as well as Reminiscences and Memoirs of very old ones?' I was asked the other day to interest a publisher in the work of a promising youth unknown to me. I asked his age. It was twenty-two. 'What has he written?'—promising to make some acquaintance with his work as a condition of praising it. Believe me, I was answered that he had published nothing as yet, but was understood to be busy on an autobiography. Indeed, a boy of fifteen wrote one, the other day and, what is more, found a publisher. But here *Tristram Shandy*, Book VI, Chapter 2, obligingly saves me trouble:

What are these, continued my father—(breaking out in a kind of enthusiasm)—what are these to those prodigies of childhood in Grotius, Scioppius, Heinsius, Politian, Pascal, Joseph Scaliger, Ferdinand de Cordoué and others;—some of whom left off their

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substantial forms at nine years old, or sooner, and went on reasoning without them;—others went through their classics at seven—wrote tragedies at eight—Ferdinand de Cordoué was so wise at nine—t'was thought the devil was in him;—and at Venice gave such proofs of his knowledge and goodness that the monks imagined he was Antichrist, or nothing. Others were masters of fourteen languages at ten; finished the course of their rhetoric, poetry, logic, and ethics at eleven, put forth their commentaries upon Servius and Marcianus Capella at twelve;—and at thirteen received their degrees in philosophy, laws, and divinity.... The great Lipsius composed a work the day he was born.... They should have wiped it up, said my uncle Toby, and said no more about it.

On the other side of to-day's fashion I read eagerly enough as many volumes as I can afford of reminiscences of ripe old men who have lived in the centre of politics, of military action, of 'Society', even of literary coteries. But my life, as will appear, has happened at a remove from all these.

I go back to the boy at the Pantomime and try to piece in order the steps by which a child grew to hanker after Beauty as the beanstalk at the top of which one attained Truth. From my account, therefore, of Taffy's emotion at the Pantomime I cut out, above, this passage:

Often he had sought the trout-pools on the moors and lying at full length had watched the fish moving between the stones and water-plants; and watching, had longed to change places with them and glide through their grottoes or anchor among the reedstalks and let the ripple run over him. As long as he could remember all beautiful sights awakened in him this longing—

O that I were where I would be!
Then would I be where I am not;
For where I am I would not be
And where I would be, I cannot.

Trying to separate strict truth from the story chronologically, I surmise that chronology here gets mixed up.

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A godparent had given me a book—*Child's Play* by E.V.B.—and I have it yet, tattered after seventy years by the hard wear of two nurseries. I have never in those years met with a book in which nursery rhymes were so exquisitely chosen for their underlying poetry, or so poetically illustrated. The lines above quoted went with a drawing which ever reminds me of the Mariana scene opening Act iv of *Measure for Measure*. There is no boy in the picture to sing 'Take, O take those lips away', but a bench on a stone terrace overlooking a plain half-dusk in a dying sunset, and on the bench a lady with a hound, his faithful head laid on her lap. Time and again as I turned the pages this picture arrested me by its mysteriously suggested beauty. There are critics, I understand, who would explain this, to themselves at any rate, as 'nostalgia': but I cannot recall any Intimations of Immortality or sense of an 'angel infancy'. A small prig I must have been in those days, conscious of some sublime but undefined mission, mixed up with a vague religiosity which I shall try to explain in my next section. But of the child, aged seven or eight, I set down a confession. In those days in the old unrestored Church of St Petroc, Bodmin, certain privileged families occupied (wrongly of course) the old Choir Stalls, the singers—mostly female—being stowed away behind the great tomb of Prior Vivian, on whose recumbent effigy the male choristers piled their hats. We on the *Decani* side enjoyed the view of a south window of clear glass, through which one could follow the birds at their nesting business in the churchyard trees. Its clear quaint pane, too, all transparent, had acquired a variety of tints out of which a wandering mind played at making patterns. But on our left in the forenoon light shone the golden East Window which a later taste has condemned, removed, stacked away somewhere (I believe) as rubbish, and replaced with neo-Gothic mullions and an artistic scatter of figures in modern stained glass with no design in it but a vague suggestion that we, as it, should be imitators of the Middle Ages. True

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it is that the old window was a *painted* transparency (and for this, if any purist find it fatal, let him condemn the Reynolds windows in the ante-Chapel of New College, Oxford). Still less excusable, indeed unpardonable, was the fitting of the glass into square frames. But the picture was of the Ascension, simple, large, and in colouring magnificent, the design (I believe) of one Lowe of London. It ran up from shadows almost black, of the disciples at the foot of the hill past edges of brown, into a glory of yellow gold which lightened aloft into a dazzle of the white-robed Christ. The child's imagination fed on this and so caught him up that (pardon for the little prig's confession) when the Choir, chanting the *Benedictus*, came to 'And thou, Child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways', I would blush and look down, as if the eyes of the whole congregation were expectant upon me!

Forgive this! I am trying to recollect (for what it is worth) the stages through which a child's mind passed through a mixture of fairy tale and religiosity to that search of truth within beauty after which in later life he can claim to have kept faithful. So far as I can judge, then, my early imagination was bookish, taken from my father's library and the nursery's, and his talks with me on his medical rounds. For his vehicles—and I remember a succession of them of various construction—had all one furniture in common, that the seats would be incommmodated with books. In these he would read, either walking behind, if the hill were steep, having handed the reins to me, or on an easier ascent letting the reins lie loose while he read aloud beside me. As his favourites would be Sir Thomas Browne, Shelley, Lamb and Carlyle—a mixed bag!—it may be guessed that I understood little: but what I *did* take away was a boyish conviction that to be a man of letters was one of the finest things in the world. Yet at this point, even at the age of nine or ten, I nursed a dislike of Carlyle which—save for a brief glow, some

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ten years later, over *Past and Present*—has lasted to this day.

All this points to a bookish boyhood. Yet I lived avidly for such outdoor sports as came within reach: learned to ride, and jump banks, to fish in the River Camel; to swim in its pools above Dunmere, a stiff walk there and back; even won some fame among the local boys as a long-distance runner. I took long walks, too; whether for the sake of boasting about them or to escape from governess rule memory does not record, as it tells nothing of any impression the very beautiful scenery that surrounds the town then made on me. There lingers only a vague recollection of day-dreams and the persistent lure of running water, its music still to me loveliest in the world. Reaching it in pretence of fishing, and setting down my rod unused, I would fall to making a fleet of boats out of bark and twigs, launching them by twos and threes and follow wagering on the first to reach the edge of a cascade and be plunged over—a simple amusement to engage any ordinary boy.

There came a day, however, when our vehicle—this time a four-wheeled dog-cart—with groom in front, my elder sister and I on the rear seat, and my father on foot some paces behind, reading a book, as we crawled up Halgavar hill, without warning the near hind-wheel detached itself and we children were gently slid in a ditch, a small avalanche of books scattered on top of us. Out of these, while my father inspected the damage and our man trotted off on the mare with harness dangling, to fetch help from a wheelwright (luckily near), I picked a small volume (the first in a handy set of Knight's Shakespeare) and started, amid the brambles, to read *The Tempest*. It was my first reading in Shakespeare, 'all a wonder and a wild surmise', and this first love may account for a life-long preference of *The Tempest* above all his plays, even those esteemed his greatest: or it may be a weakness in me that no tragic pity or terror—not even the last Act of

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Othello—ever commands my tears in comparison with a poem picture or tale of mere beauty. Late in life, in a Cambridge lecture, I could assert:

I can just imagine a future age of men in which the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost* with *Othello* and *Lear* have passed into curiosities; as I can barely imagine a world in which the murder of Desdemona, the fate of Cordelia will be considered curiously as brute happenings, proper to a time outlived ... *The Tempest*, as I see it, forces diviner tears, tears for sheer beauty; with a royal sense of this world and how it passes away, with a catch at the heart of what is to come... with wisdom and charity, with forgiveness, tender ruth for all men and women growing older, and perennial trust in young love.

—and this of a play founded on a fairy tale!

Sir Walter Scott held that to cultivate a child's imagination was at least as beneficial as the drilling of any other faculty: and looking back upon my father's quiet care for this, and what happiness my life has owed to it, I may modestly agree. I propose to say more of this in a later section, but confine myself here to one specific of Fairy Tales—their insensible leading of a child to understand in later life his fellow-men of all sorts and conditions. In the fairy-tale based on the folk-tale, prince and peasant meet on common ground: the woodcutter's youngest son goes out with his knapsack and wins the king's daughter. The tales are 'universal' not only in the sense of being diffused among inhabitants all over the earth, but through a fine simplicity beyond reach of the popular novelist: in fine, because they are 'aristocratic', as Chaucer, for instance, is aristocratic.

In our generation, as most of its survivors will agree, the relationship between father and son was far more formal, even distant, than it has generally and happily become. My father was never 'Sir' to me; but a sort of veil ever lay between us, until lifted during a holiday walk some years later in the course of which we visited his old home, Polperro. The remembered lanes maybe loosed the

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habitual reserve—holidays being so rare with him—but for the time, and to my wondering response of affection, he was an elder brother, and we shared all manner of confidence with open hearts. Some hint of this he had given on my first visit to London, my age something over fourteen. We had arrived in the dark after a tedious Sunday journey and put up at Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street, much frequented in those days by the Cornish. Early next morning my father took me for a walk around some of his old haunts—Paternoster Row, St Paul's, then back in by Apothecaries' Hall to cross the river and follow it up to the Surrey end of Waterloo Bridge. Pointing to its noble arches and the sunlit façade of Somerset House on the farther bank, 'I brought you', he said, 'to see this. You may grow up to travel, as I have never been able: but fix this in your memory, and when you stand admiring some group of great architecture in foreign cities, fetch your mind home to *this*.' (The reader may guess with what feelings I have seen, in these later days, the destruction of Rennie's bridge.) My father said it with an emotion which puzzled me, who had no inkling that he stood with a few hours' verdict between life and death. We crossed the bridge, and by a barber's shop near Temple Bar he dismissed me to our hotel with the remark that 'it was time he had his beard trimmed'. That afternoon he underwent an operation to remove a growth on his upper lip, suspected as malignant. My mother, who was present, told me later that he had declined an anaesthetic, had stood up throughout with no support but his grip on the back of a chair, and no sound at all but one sharp intake of breath. Happily the operation turned out a success: the wound healed rapidly and the trouble never recurred.

I may balance this with an instance of his moral courage. For years he fought against the 'sanitation' of Bodmin: where in those days diphtheria was endemic in the lower quarter of the town, a great part of its drainage stagnant in a horrible pool under the walls of the gaol, and typhoid

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(as we have seen) almost a resident here and there in 'better' houses. Suddenly a virulent epidemic of scarlet fever invaded the town; the doctors were worked off their legs, and the bills of mortality mounted week by week. My father (a sceptic on many points of traditional medicine) had a strong belief in the efficacy of nursing, with its accompaniment of soap and fresh air. But of trained nurses to be had at call there was, in 1870 or thereabouts, not the beginning of a supply. He had heard of a staff (I forget where) of devoted Roman Catholic 'Sisters of Mercy' and boldly engaged them. At once there arose an outcry that he was importing Papacy and (on the bye) that the very garb of these sisters was enough to frighten the sick into their graves. The garb, indeed, he deplored, but could not remedy: as to the religious infection, he must leave the town to counteract that other later on.¹ The scourge, quickly allayed, was for a while so severe that, in default of a coachman, I had to drive him from house to house. He had a belief that familiarity with infection either inoculated in some subtle way, or was in some sort a preservative, that it behove a medical man—and, I must add, in justice to my mother—on his professional honour to open heart and even house, at any risk, in an emergency.

So, while memory keeps many chance revelations, as through a shutter, of his habitual courtesy—a vision of him, for example, walking uphill to relieve his carriage packed with poor folk after their medicines—two regrets yet haunt me; the first that I never realised his most

¹ A small Roman Catholic Chapel, dated 1842, stood at the north end of the town. But its services had languished, and by 1867 had been discontinued. Later, these were revived, and a boy friend and I used to attend them for the sake of hearing Mozart and the Masses beautifully sung by three sisters who devotedly came over from Liskeard. Since, the Priory of Regular Canons of the Lateran has been revived and flourishes. But (as illustrating the opposition my father had to fight) many years later I overtook and walked with an old antagonist who opened on the proselytising ways of the new 'Papists' in Bodmin. 'They make friends right and left', he complained: 'and they pay their tradesmen regularly.' 'Well', said I, for he was a tradesman, 'at any rate *that's* to their credit', and was answered with a shut of the jaws, 'Oh, they're *cunning*.'

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modest courage as his own father did. 'Thomas is one of the best fellows in the world: you can trust him when all the rest of the world fails.'

My other regret is more poignant. In time the task fell to me of sorting out his papers. In his note-books I found evidence that he had yielded, occasionally and very seldom, to a queer trick of jotting down some private and personal resolution or confession, or it might be trivial as a reminder of a birthday, all equally irrelevant to the material of folklore, place-names, extracts from old cartularies, records of earliest flowering plants, etc., in which they surprisingly occurred. Near the end came an entry, penned in the last year of his life, referring to me in words of tenderest affection and hope. Heaven forgive us both who through shyness never broke the barrier to unite a father's and a son's affectionate understanding.

III

Here the record must go back to tell of days in Devon which, perhaps more than those at home, awakened my childhood.

My mother's father, Elias Ford, was the younger son of a Yeoman family whose graves for generations lie about in South Devon. Being a younger son, he was started in a 'business' which he so rapidly developed that, quite early in life, he sought and, being possessed of good looks, won the hand of Theophila Clarke, a young lady of—as at any rate her family must have accounted it—superior station. My mother was their one child and spoil. In no short time my grandfather transferred his business to an elder brother and retired upon his family acres which he could then afford, limited as they were, to transform into a model farm, mainly directed to dairy produce, with a side-line in Berkshire pigs. The little demesne was exquisitely tended; its dairy 'a picture' of course; its gates well timbered, hedges trimmed, pastures drained, stables swept; the very

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limestone pavements around stables and byres religiously cleansed every day.

In youth and early manhood he had been a sturdy Whig, and, having a gift of blunt straightforward speech, had done what (for once) may be accurately called 'yeoman's service' in support of Lord John Russell and his Reform Bills. (I recall on a visit with him to Totnes his halting before the porch of the *Seymour Arms* and telling me how he had stood above it in 1831 at Lord John's side and led the cheers of the crowd after the South Devon election of that year.) Active politics, however, had become a thing of the past with him many years before I was born, and I came to know him as, apart from occasional explosions at the domestic board, an old Liberal, hard-in-grain but mellow, with a hankering personal affection for many 'on the other side'—in particular for Sir Stafford Northcote (afterwards Earl of Iddesleigh)—'one of the best of men' he would say, and then qualify it with 'but Gladstone taught him all he knows of finance, or ever will'.

I suppose the village of Abbotskerswell to be one of the most delightful of many in delightful South Devon. It lies in a dip over a hill beyond Woolborough Church, the outpost of Newton Abbot. Close by the Church you take a footpath to the left, round a farm, and climb a hill from which a backward look opens the valley of the Teign. A plantation—the 'Decoy'—runs, or then ran, down to the playing fields of Newton Abbot College, levelled above a cluster of clay-pits; beyond these to the left, a few dotted villa gardens; to the right, the estuary broadening down to Teignmouth; in the northern distance the hills of Dartmoor. A fair view this: but when the footpath gained the ridge you overed a stile, crossed a narrow road, overed another stile—in all, the business of half a minute—and saw below, at the foot of a steep corn-field, one of the prettiest villages that even Devon cradles; lovely beyond prettiness in the April-May when its thatched roofs hid

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themselves under a foam of apple blossom but breathing up and through it in wisps of blue chimney-smoke:

I know my home; and it affords some ease
To see far off the smoaking villages.

But this village, close under my feet, appears near in memory and changeless until I come to the foot of the slope like 'Jacob's Ladder' that dives, as of old, to the heart of a private road, which in turn descended past the great barn, the double doors of the farmstead and so by a butt-end of the house, opened on the village street.

I revisited Abbotskerswell some while ago, on a day in ripe autumn; to meet cart after cart, on its way to a factory, shedding apples carelessly into the ruts it was helping to deepen, dribble after dribble of England's 'waste fertility' overflowing the backboard to be crushed by the next cart-wheels. I recalled the old economy of the private apple-loft and cider-press, the careful sorting, the vyings of owners on the quality, their bets on this or the measure of the yield: and I reflected on the blessing of 'mass-production'.

The old house was a shell, merely; it housed a caretaker, who, with his wife, kept guard over its desolation. The uncurtained windows stared across the ruin of a small terrace garden that had been my grandmother's constant care and pride. Gone was the great wistaria from the abutment of the cider-barn that had flanked her beds of ranunculas, sweet Williams, verbena, roses of another age—damask, moss, old hybrid perpetuals with their unforgettable scents, climbing 'Seven Sisters', 'Monthly', 'Gloire de Dijon'.... The good man offered to show me through the rooms, but I hadn't the heart even to visit the empty dairy, slate paved, sometime ranged along with slabs of slate, bearing pans of clotted cream crowned with its top layer of honey-coloured gold;¹ on the floor other

¹ True Devon and Cornish cream is hard to discover now, thanks to County Dairy Committees, and their enthusiasm for misapplied 'science and the separator'. This machine not only spoils the cream it extracts: it leaves

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bright pans into which flannel jelly-bags dripped 'lucent syrups'. The paving-stones seemed to hold hollow echoes as I walked past the empty cow byres to the gate beyond which two paths divided, that to the left into a chain of orchards, the other straight into a high-walled garden, at the very entrance to which the scent of madonna lilies met me. But no lilies were there. Gone too were the well-tended rows of peas, beans, lettuce; the espaliers once heavy with pears and a particular scion of the apricot:

The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the peach to the garden wall.

They had even cut down the giant filbert tree. This had overhung a bench on which nobody ever sat by reason of a sticky deposit from its foliage.

The reader must forgive these details. I had not intended them; but being engaged to tell the story I find that it would lose its meaning, for what that is worth, were I to omit many small things which build up its moral—for what *that* eventually may be worth.

For example—a clear stream ran at the foot of the garden by the raspberry canes, trapped midway to a conduit which pierced the hedge to feed a duck-pond on the other, or orchard, side: the main current passing on to drive through a tunnel of slates, heavy but removable, to allow the dairy-pans to be lowered on sultry nights, covered, and left till dawn to cool in the run of the water. On the orchard side and close by the duck-pond, leaned an old apple tree, its base embedded in a mass of white violets famous for their scent, a low swing hanging from a lower branch. On this I would laze by the hour, watching the ducks and telling myself tales—episodes, rather, of a story that went on and never ended, its heroes drawn in the main from recollections of two books in my father's

a bluish offal unnutritious even for the pigs it is cast to: and this in its turn accounts for the wretched quality of our 'post-War' bacon. In general the advertisement of 'Dairy-fed Bacon' covers humbug and untruth.

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library—the *Morte d'Arthur* and a translation of *Amadis de Gaul*. *Ivanhoe* came later, and then the early volumes of Moxon's Tennyson, to set me charging with a clothes prop between the apple trees: for I specialised in tournaments.

Yet I think, looking back, of more value to me than these day-dreams—but 'growing pains' after all—has been the understanding my childhood insensibly took from the company of my grandfather's labouring men. He kept three only in steady employ: George Jeffery, the 'hind' or head man; William Vinning or Venning, an ex-Chartist, bachelor, and reputed unbeliever; Sam Wotton, waggoner, huge and simple, with a regularly increasing family the number of which my grandmother as regularly deplored and helped; these with a rude farm-boy who rejoiced in imparting to me (until old Jeffery caught him at it and he rejoiced no more) obscene rhymes which I did not understand in the least. But I envied his eye for a bird's nest, and adored Sam Wotton as his two farm-horses, Lion and Pleasant, adored him.

The elder three fathered me as the only son of the family. Old Jeffery between whiles would discourse on soils, crops, husbandry, weather signs, the caprices of this or that field: William Vinning of timber, ground game, vermin, plants (he was something of a botanist and kept, in the bachelor lodging where he tended his own weeds and a patch of garden, a book-case, *The Cow-keeper's Manual* wedged between Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Asmodeus, or The Devil on Two Sticks*). Sam Wotton merely listened. The two never instructed me directly save when I asked some eager question, but exchanged bits of lore which each must have heard a hundred times: and this their subtle way of teaching not only so fired me that soon I had to beg and be given rake and pitchfork suitable to my size, with leave to work all day in the hay-fields—these implements fashioned to my precocious judgment by the village wheelwright who probably winked a solemn eye as one of the conspiracy.

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Better even than days of haymaking were those of harvest. I doubt indeed if any of a younger generation can realise what the wheat harvest meant to any village of rural England before the inrush of imported American corn. Day after day Abbotskerswell would watch the wheat ripening, whitening, until one evening the master gave the signal and by dawn the whole population had poured into the first field: the men, six or seven in echelon, step by step rhythmically swaying, with pauses by consent to sharpen their reap-hooks (sickles); the sun-bonneted women close behind their heels, gathering up the stalks in armfuls and whipping them into sheaves with incredible speed; for none but those bred to it had the skill, or could have endured the hours of stooping, of blistered heads, of the hot sun burning necks and forearms to negro-brown. But a fury held them, like the fury of a gold-rush, and indeed for the village it was its Golconda—wages high and the gleanings (which were appreciable) a free gift to the cottage maids to carry home. Best of all came the final tea-drinking, somehow accurately timed, when the last waggon-load stood against the sunset ready to be followed to barn, the tea and cider passed around with cakes and 'splits' and Devonshire cream in bowls crowned with golden crust; when we gathered beneath a hedge and all tongues were loosened together as we gazed across the long acres shorn to stubble, and gossiped until the bats wheeled down too close for the women, and the waggon started to jolt home. Memory tells me that I attended two of such harvestings before my grandfather introduced a horse reaping machine; as I certainly watched once his hay-fields cut by scythe, for I can see now the second or third man in the rank arresting his blade and stooping to hand me a lark's nest which he was on the edge of destroying.

Looking back, I count it happy fortune that cast a child's lot among these scenes and these people, in a passage of time when so much that was homely, comely, and of mutual accord in village life, had come almost to the

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edge of disappearing. At the time, I fear, its most ostensible effect in me was a trick of startling polite visitors, to my grandmother's annoyance, with answers all too prone to lapse into rustic idiom and the soft broad accent of the South Hams. Yet I believe that those childish days held a lesson, at the time unconsciously imbibed, and long latent, that, reviving in middle life, helped me to enjoy dealing with all sorts and conditions of men in local affairs, committee work, session work; to amuse many an hour, cheat impatience and master the desire to be at home attempting a fresh page of a book.

I must end this section with a few words on my grandparents.

It was some years later that, from a hasty word or two let fall in anger by our old and devoted cook (a widowed daughter of George Jeffery, the hind), that I learned something of my grandmother's descent. 'She's too high in the insteps for the likes of we, though I'll grant 'tis rare she lets you see it.' When I asked what this figure of speech might mean, it was blurted out that my grandmother had, 'being by haveage a Courtenay of Devon', 'demeaned herself' somehow by bestowing her hand upon my good-looking grandfather. This, of course, interested me (who, as it happened, had just received a school prize at the hands of the 'Good Earl' as everyone called him). And confirmation stared at one out of the family feature in my great-grandmother's portrait—lace-capped in the fashion of Jane Austen's time—which hung in the dining-room and had, by a painter's trick, eyes that followed my youthful sins to that room's remotest corner. I have that portrait yet. Long since age has hardened me against those eyes and their unflinching reproof.

Her own features in no way resembled the portrait's; being delicate, not exactly beautiful, but illuminated by a complexion which, to the end, suggested a soft inner lamp shining through paper tinged as softly with Devon rose. Short of stature and frail, and for years suffering from a

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disease of the hip, she seldom travelled beyond her garden wherein, supported by a tall malacca cane topped with stag-horn, she pruned her roses, trained the wistaria, superintended the planting of ranunculas or pegging down of verbenas in the 'formal' beds. That she had ever stooped down in marrying I am sure there was never on her part a sign. She adored the husband of her choice, as he, in a hundred small ways, showed himself the constant lover. She seldom went abroad; but at home she extended the same courtesy to his former friends, and to their wives (who would come 'for the day' with their best caps in boxes) as to her own kinsfolk, her pride confined to the napery, the cooking, and the evidence of her dairy skill, in which last, as in her exquisite needlework, she had no rival for miles. The one extravagance for which her husband twitted her in company was in dress, of which, always of black silk, she insisted on a richness such that a skirt should stand up on the floor 'of itself'. It had, too, to be perfectly shaped. My grandfather owned a strange vehicle, commonly known as 'the Car', specially designed for her infirmity. It was entered by a low step at the rear, and furnished inside with arm-straps by which the occupants pulled themselves forward or back at the foot of each hill or top of each declivity; the family adjustment ever anticipated by Punch—our black carriage-horse, obese and cynical—planting his feet for a long halt. The venue being Newton Abbot, after passing through the town, and half-way up Highweek Hill, Punch planted his feet beside the brass plate of Miss De Gruchy, Dress Maker; and this time not to be urged a step farther by whip, threat or cajoling, a shake of the ears answering all these incitements with a *j'y suis, j'y reste*.

Her ailment increasing, my grandmother took to sleeping in a small room beyond the large bedchamber through which we children ran in our dressing gowns to sit on her bed and share her morning tea—its fragrance, blending with that of toilet scent of her own distilling and wafts of

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a rose-bush through the open window, made a combination the ghost of which haunts memory. There half-raised, with snowy nightcap, a China shawl over shoulders and breast, she would read or tell tales to us before speeding us off to bathe and dress. I have a fancy that having given birth to such a creature of impulse as my mother was a perpetual mystery to her. For my father, his knowledge and gentle manner, she had a deep regard. But on us grandchildren she spent a passion of care. I have a vision, clear now as then, to illustrate it. All hands were busy in the long meadows at the foot of the village, carrying the last of the hay, and on my entreaty I had been hoisted on to a rick, to be shown the art of packing. In the midst of it, pausing to lift my small fork and look down in pride from the height, I saw, by the wall at the gate, my grandmother, staff in hand, leaning against the top-rail. I had begged at breakfast to be allowed up the packers' ladder, and all the afternoon she had been tortured by recalling how an uncle George had fallen from a rick in that very meadow. The men being all in the fields, there was no way of harnessing up a vehicle. At length, unable to endure her fear for me, she—whose walk for many months had not exceeded fifty yards—tottered a mile through the empty village and beyond, to make sure no harm had befallen me (God forgive me), the child of her hopes.

I like to believe that I paid her love back with all that the selfishness of childhood allowed. I was told when her end came she died asking for me: but I was away at Oxford, and did not know.

My grandfather, on the other hand, affected a sternness, terrifying enough when he lectured us after one of our many childish scrapes, *vide* my sister Mabel's story *A Pair of Red-Polls*—but ever resourceful in screening us from any serious consequences. This core of kindness, sad to say, proved the bane of a life otherwise prosperous. Frugal in all personal habits, shrewd in managing his own as well as local affairs, he could not resist helping friends or

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relatives with moneys that were never repaid or bonds that fell back on him to be discharged. In the end he gave up home and fields to an elder brother who had made a mess in business (and afterwards of farming); retired to a small house in Newton Abbot; wound up his affairs to a scruple, and died a poor man.

He took great pains to drill my young ardours in the discipline and the ways of country life, work and sport, taught me at seven to grip my knees and sit behind him with a hold on his belt while he put his blood-horse Tommy from trot to gallop: in winter took me for long walks afield, where I proudly carried his second gun with powder and shot pouches, and was taught to load the long muzzle-loaders, ram the wads home and fix the percussion caps. All this was joy, but bitter the end of a day when he took me to bathe at Dawlish and two heavy waves smothered me, rolling me face down in the shingle, from which I emerged crying. 'I hoped better of your pluck', was his one remark: but all the long drive home I choked down the shame, to let it loose that night on a pillow, with prayers to God to make me braver.

But this brings me to a small cloud which grew until it overshadowed my growth for a long while.

In their religious tenets and daily observance my grandparents were unfaltering Evangelicals. This strain ran strong in the families of both. Graves of dead Fords congregated near the yew tree by Abbotskerswell's diminutive Church: and a portrait of my great-grandmother Sarah Ford, which daily looks down on me from a dark corner of the dining-room, might personify her form of religion. She wears a close-fitting cap of linen that hides her hair; a dress of complete black. Her lips are thin, compressed, her gaze severe, her hands (vilely painted) clasp a Book of Prayer in full morocco. The very hardness of this daub scene, by interpretation, does its painter credit for discernment.

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On Sunday mornings—my grandfather and I walking some minutes ahead—the rest of the family would be tittupped in ‘the Car’ to church, to the Ford pew, a large wooden structure out of all proportion to the building, set immediately behind a three-decker pulpit and cased so high that one saw but the bald head of the clerk on its lowest stage, the upper part of the Parson on the second, and his hinder person when, after a visit to the vestry to exchange surplice for black Geneva gown, he mounted to the topmost stage and delivered his sermon. Of the congregation nothing could be seen from within our great box save when we children stood up on our seats for the canticles and hymns. But then we had a full view of the musicians in the high western gallery—violins and bass viol sawing, clarinet and oboe blowing, open mouths of the choir behind these. Parson Hine—as I remember him a refined old gentleman who, putting aside his office, in daily life ‘kept himself to himself’—would read the lesson in one of the most beautiful voices I have ever heard, and afterwards read in the same voice flattened to monotony, a forty minutes’ sermon, charming us asleep or near to sleep, rather; for the seats of the pew being uncomfortably high, our childish legs dangled an inch or two short of the kneeling hassocks. I fear we sometimes feigned an inclination to drop off the bench, whereat Granny, forestalling a bump on the floor, would lift her silk skirt and from a waistbag slung between it and underskirt produce a vinaigrette with a small box from which she doled out a gelatine lozenge to each of us.

Sunday afternoons are a blank to me: for the farm slept, the house, and so, I suspect, did our elders. Perhaps we wiled away the hours between dinner and walking time with visits to the live-stock or in searching the orchard bounds for hens’ eggs overlooked in the morning’s collection. Our toys had been put away for the Sabbath, every newspaper folded overnight and cupboarded. It was forbidden to open the great ottoman and dress ourselves up

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in the gay remnants of silks and satins stored there, for that would have been 'play-acting on the Lord's Day'. As for reading, the great bookcase contained volumes of sermons and biographies of Evangelical divines: but, for literature, a one-volume Shakespeare (unhappily a too late trove of mine), Macaulay's *History* in five volumes, another volume of his *Speeches*; of fiction nothing but a work entitled *No Fiction*, by one Reid, the title of which had probably won its inclusion, as the contents warranted it, proving quite unreadable to a child bred in a library packed with fiction from Scott to Dickens. There was also Samuel Warren's *Diary of a Late Physician*, the title of which long repelled me until Childe Roland to that dark tower came, with a result to be told. Then one day, exploring a second best bedroom in an entresol that opened to the back of the house, I found a small bookcase and within it a ragged regiment of outcasts (as I suppose) from my grandfather's unregenerate youth—some paper-covered books of songs, including *The Rat-Catcher's Daughter* and *Villikins*, a neatly bound *Joe Miller*, a tattered *Guide to Oxford* and Grieg's *Waterloo*. These two last turned out to be relics of excursions with a deceased 'Uncle Robert'. They could only have visited Oxford by coach as travellers-through: but had stayed in Paris, Brussels, and walked the fields of Waterloo a year or so after the battle. I have inherited Grieg's volume, which after many re-readings and comparison with other narratives of the campaign and the battle still holds its own for vivacity.

Now I dare say these good grandparents spared to inflict their own positive religious doctrine upon us children out of delicacy: that while exigent upon all points of conduct, from truth-speaking to table-manners, they held our doctrinal training a matter properly left to our own parents—to my father specially, for whom (as I have hinted) they both entertained an intellectual respect, and no small affection.

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I dimly remember being puzzled by all this. A child of pietistic instincts, as I was, wants definite information about God; on learning somehow that his little soul needs 'salvation', very naturally wants to know what it is and just how to get at it; and though he arrive not at this, his inquisitiveness will have a queer knack of delving beneath that which his elders tell him—into the elders' own selves. And so or somehow I surmised that at least a large part of their religious observance was conditioned by fear of God's wrath and eternal damnation.

I shall here run ahead of my story by two or three years, to get over and done with a distressing phase in my growth. When the time came for me to leave home for school I lodged with these grandparents for a couple of years as a day-boy. By this time my grandfather, now removed to Newton Abbot, was leaning towards Congregationalism (he was one of the first Governors of Taunton School) and active in the building of a Congregational Church hard by his new home. The pastor of this Church was a preacher of rare eloquence, and on Sunday evenings regularly played the virtuoso upon every string of terror, painting Hell for us, its fires and torture everlasting, as vividly as though he, an eye-witness, had of late been there and barely escaped back across the one narrow bridge over the Pit. I dare say the man was honest—so far honest, that is, as anyone will be who believes and reports what he cannot possibly know—in the way, at its best, that Dante and Milton are honest. What *I* know is that for two or three years this preacher so afflicted a child that he would wake and grip the bed-clothes to hold back a scream. It was never for myself that this horror seized me. Little prig that I was, and on no assurance at this distance of time to be recaptured, I belonged to the elect, my own redemption assured. It was for my father and mother, with their easy-going religious ways, that I awoke sweating from dreams of them in torture.

And then—as nearly as I remember at the age of twelve

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or thirteen, and for no assignable reason—this nightmare just faded out, vanished and left me, boy and man, with no curiosity whatever about Hell, and no more than a polite attentiveness to anyone who starts to talk about it. Here is not the place to trouble the reader with my maturer religious beliefs. But here are two not likely to be revised:

(1) It is, from stupidity or not, a wickedness to terrorise any child's mind with terror of God. However good the intention this is one with which Hell—if there be such a place—is paved.

(2) I believe in the essential goodness of human nature—and my reading backs me—that it has power simply to *outlive* any doctrine of any Church resorting to any cruelty for enforcement. All the old business of human sacrifice, of God or the gods delighting in the smell of man's fat, of burning heretics, of the devil and his pitchfork, of witches, of the damnation of unbaptized infants—all this and such like yield in the end to no argument, but last only to be dropped aside out of decent men's hearts and minds.

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II

NEWTON ABBOT

THERE came an evening in my tenth year which found me planted on a lower step of the staircase at home (I can recall the scene pretty vividly) protesting that I would attend the Misses Lutman's seminary no longer, and demanding with angry tears to be sent away to a boarding-school. Childhood is selfish, and in this sudden passionate self-assertion no doubt I played ingrate towards the good Lutmans, forgetting all I owed to them and maybe the pride they were beginning to take in me (for I have lived to learn the *στοργή* that lives in the spinster heart of many an old governess or instructress—and, her pupils grown up and gone, will follow their careers with the old devotion undying though unheeded). Yet had my revolt come of mere instinct, much might be pleaded for it, as that it was natural and, as it turned out, even wise.

But, to speak truth, instinct had precious little to do with the crisis, being quite subordinate at the moment to two boyish crazes. The first of these might have happened to any boy. I had been devouring one of those serials published from Fleet Street by John Brett, editor of *Boys of England*. *Tom Wil Drake's Schooldays* was the title, or something like it, and it dealt with derrings-do at an impossible private school, from which the hero passed to Cheltenham and (in a sequel) to the Indian Mutiny and Cawnpore. The tale was crude no doubt, but it opened promises of school life with prowess, and unconscious of his doom the little victim yearned.

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My second craze may seem far less credible. Yet it is a fact I cannot tell how or when the name 'Oxford' took hold upon my childish imagination: but I know that even in the nursery it conjured up visions of the one terrestrial City to which (please God) I must somehow and some day attain. Readers of my friend Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age* will remember the young brother Harold, his pet diversion of ambling in imagination the round of various London clubs arm-in-arm with an imaginary companion of ripe years. ('Harold was ascending the steps of the Athenaeum with a jaunty air—suggestive rather of the Junior Carlton.') I knew, needless to say, nothing of Oxford save that it was a place of colleges and towers beside a river on which one learned rowing—this also a swelling young ambition: but at the age of seven or eight, as tyrant over our nursery, mine was ever the dark blue ball at parlour croquet, the translucent dark blue marble at 'solitaire', etc.; and should this be of interest to any student of child psychology, let me add, as one never conscious of strength of will above the ordinary, it must be by fate or chance that certain of these childish daydreams have come true.

At any rate, the moment of my revolt was as timely as ill chosen: timely because my grandfather happened to be staying with us on a short visit; ill chosen because that visit (as later I divined) had come to the aid of one of my dear extravagant mother's financial appeals. It was agreed, unknown to me, that reason lay beneath my unreasoned appeal, the question only being its immediate cost: in the end decided by my being entered as a day-boy at Newton College and living with my grandparents, by this time removed to Newton Abbot.

Newton College, nurse in its time of some scholars, many sound country gentlemen, of a disproportionate number of eminent soldiers, has this year (1940) suffered the fate of so many schools of its class under State-aided 'Secondary' competition and been amalgamated into the well-endowed Kelly College of Tavistock.

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Newton, when I entered it, was passing through a curious and somewhat unhappy phase. Started (to quote its prospectus) as 'a School for the Sons of Gentlemen', it had enlisted at the outset boys of good family in Devon and the West. Its Headmaster, the Reverend W. Stabback Johns of St John's or of Exeter College, Oxford (I forget which), was a fine classical scholar, of gentlest temper and manners, but easy-going to a degree: with the result that numbers had declined and, to reinforce them the Governors had opened the lower forms to a score or two of boys passed in as 'sons of gentlemen' but without manners or prospect of using a classical education to qualify for that title. So it happened that a remnant of elder youths of seventeen or eighteen, soon to depart for University or training in land-ownership, were left at the head of the School—Talbot, Melhuish, Hamlyn, Drew (who took Orders and afterwards married a daughter of Mr Gladstone), Gamble (in time to be Dean of Exeter), these holding themselves aloof and despising the raw lower classes. They were, as I remember, fine fellows all, but careless as gods of any duty to build and leave a school tradition. The bullying, in these lower forms thus neglected, was horrible. One Walter D—, son of our Vicar at home, and half-way up the school, had promised to 'look after' me. On my first morning he informed me that at 12 noon I must be initiated, have my ankles strapped to a trapeze and be swung off, head downwards, from the gymnasium bridge-ladder. He showed me his clasp-knife and obligingly undertook to cut me down before I turned black in the face—a somewhat unsatisfying assurance from one who had, I suspect, pocketed a small tip on the strength of his promise at home. Memory tells me, a little confused, that I fled and hid for the rest of the day in a near plantation until hunger and nightfall forced me to creep back unheroically to my grandparents' house. My grandfather took prompt action: marched up to the Headmaster early, and did not leave without extracting from the head boy,

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Talbot, his word that he and the Sixth would make life uncomfortable for anyone who hereafter molested me. I don't doubt the protecting of an ugly little red-haired urchin of ten was accepted as something of a bore by the Olympians, who nevertheless kept the contract honourably so far as they could. But of course they could do little to break down a system of frightfulness based on a code of 'schoolboy honour' (dictated by the bullies themselves) which condemned any appeal by the weak as 'sneaking' and imposed itself upon me so religiously that after my first revolt I hardened my small heart against uttering one complaint either to my grandparents or in the holidays at home. It was enough that I had escaped being swung head downward on a trapeze.

I suspect, too, that the Olympians asked one another: What were the Lower Form masters doing, whose business it surely was to be aware of the evil and to check it? The answer to this could be found in the lowest form of all, to which I was first consigned. At a desk beside me sat a boy (Gilbert by name, if I remember) either naturally dull, or so far dulled by a savagery he accepted but did not understand, that he could not decline *mensa*. At his first mistake he would be called up to get three strokes on the palm with a cane: at his second six strokes; at the third the infuriated master would slash him on his legs, and the poor fellow would come back to the desk with hands beaten blue. Though a day-boy like myself, I believe he never complained at home, just took that ferocity as part of his introduction to the Classics. This was School, his age was eleven, in time he would grow up: meanwhile there was nothing for it but to endure. I have often wondered since at the mysterious fascination of the Classics, that devotion to them has persisted in so many who have suffered, or even witnessed, the initiation into their mysteries by the common *plagוסus Orbilius*.

Myself able to construe Caesar with fair ease, and to read French fluently, I was promoted to Form II after a few

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days, to my worse distress. For the head boy in it was a certain R—, a mere brute. He came of some farming stock in North Devon: a stout, florid lout of fourteen and over, with oiled black curls as of a *tenore robusto*; mincing before authority, cruel to the weak—and all we in the Form were individually weaker than he who had arrived at the head of it by the simple process of stupidity beyond his age. Let the reader consider the difference in strength between a boy of fourteen and one of ten whose arm can be twisted to excruciation. Master R— would seize and copy out my sums in arithmetic, or my Latin exercises, and pass them up for his own after defacing mine. Unhappily for him a set examination wound up the term's work. Our desks being separate by some feet, the result showed up an imposture which any form-master less than purblind should have detected weeks before. Likely enough R— escaped punishment; this did not matter, for I was promptly promoted well beyond reach of my tormentor. An ill wind, too, blew me some good. The School's playground in those days fell in a sharp slope on which we played a rough imitation of Rugby football, with few rules and 'hacking' an allowed feature. Masters took part in it, with the smaller boys as wing skirmishers. On one unhappy afternoon our reverend Headmaster pushed into the mellay, was rolled downhill with a struggling mass on top of him, and carried home with his leg broken. During its time of healing—and while the School went further to pieces—it occurred to him (strange comfort!) to read with me alone in his library and initiate me in the beauties of Virgil. He was a very delicate scholar, and I cannot pretend that he did more than open my eyes to the possibilities of beauty. Yet to his memory I am still grateful, holding still that once to feel the undertones of such a poet as Virgil is to open up resources of joy to be explored and drawn upon through life.

The School year ended, and from the subsequent holidays, clouded by the prospect of returning, I returned

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in fact to a transformation scene. My old friend the Headmaster had retired upon a country parsonage in the north-west: of his assistants but one, and he the decentest, remained: the Olympians in the course of nature were dispersed to the Universities or to enter a profession, and some miracle had conjured my enemy R— with the whole of his breed into air. Our Prospero, the new Headmaster, was the Reverend George Townsend Warner, of Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, who had for some years and on his own lines built up a small school rather rigidly for the 'sons of gentlemen'. I am quite well aware of the invidiousness the term may suggest in these days: but actually these 'sons of gentlemen', brought over in a body, with a new staff—men of manners and scholarship, some of them no mean athletes to boot—did actually and at once revolutionise the place for its good.

For me the one cloud in a sky so suddenly swept clean—or, shall I put it, the one fly in the ointment for past misery—was that, although in Form III and in many ways ahead of it, I had no Greek, whereas the new system teaching even in the lowest class included its elements. A kindly master, Ellis by name, excused me from other tasks, gave me a Wordsworth's (small) Grammar, and set me to master it, which I managed to do from alphabet to last page in ten days or so. With this unhappily the trouble but began, with my being pushed straightway on to the *Iliad* and given a large Liddell and Scott wherewith to make assault upon Homer. Wordsworth's Grammar being purely Attic, no recording angel could number the tears I shed into that great lexicon, the cries of despair, as I delved, night after night, after Homer's Aeolic or Ionic. Yet through these blubberings and fits of despair I knew that Homer was great if only one could get at him, nor doubted that to learn Greek was worth any cost: and oddly enough, as such trivial aids happen, this desire was fortified by our form's English Grammar (Tancock's published by the Clarendon Press), which contained an

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appendix of prose passages and among them a translation of Herodotus's story of Cleobis and Biton, as told by Solon to Croesus. It seemed to me then, seems to me yet, one of the world's most beautiful of short stories, and the Hellas in which it could happen a country of grace, afar and desirable.

This experience taught me to believe, as I still hold, that a child destined for 'the Humanities' should begin with Greek. But much reading of books on educational theories ancient and modern, with twenty odd years' experience on a County Education Committee, has left me convinced that any teacher with the gift to teach and any pupil with an innate curiosity to learn, can play skittles equally with any theory, whether invented by a lunatic or evolved by a Headmasters' Conference. So here is only the record of one man's regret over those missed years, a handicap in Greek against that real scholarship I have never reached but chased after with envy.

My story, already mixed among trivialities, is here helped by a gap in memory. Sometimes I climbed (despite a hopeless incapacity for mathematics) pretty quickly into the head form, was promoted from day-boy to boarder with a scholarship, and came under the spell of Alexander Pyne, whom I had admired from a distance and soon learned to adore. He came to us from Pembroke College, Cambridge: a young man, strikingly handsome, a neat scholar with a discriminating sense of values in our own literature; swift of foot, too, a flashing three-quarters in Rugby football as it was played in those days. Is it wonder that we boys idolised this idol of the crowd? and I with a hugged illusion of a peculiar right, because he had somehow discovered my untutored passion for Shakespeare and had set himself to instruct it. Some modest honours less merited have since fallen to me, in moments far less dear to memory than the moment when—some big-wig having handed me a prize for a 'Shakespeare paper' which had induced the examiner to give 'full marks'—Pyne stepped

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forward and asked leave to add a small book 'as a reminder of happy study together'. The prize, whatever it was, in time went the way of other school prizes: but this book, Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar*, lasted until its covers broke and the worn pages went down the wind. In 1882 or 1883 Pyne was elected to the Headmastership of Melbourne Grammar School, Australia. By this time I had reached Oxford and he paid me a special visit there, as well for friendship's sake as to learn what I had to tell of Clifton, its *ethos* as a young Public School with its ways of life as organised by Dr Percival, its famous Head. We sat up in my rooms until the small hours, talking almost as brothers, for it turned the difference of our ages upside-down that I had what he sought as eager questioner. He sailed, a few days later, full of plans and hopes, among well-wishers at home and at Melbourne; was getting into his stride to fulfil these hopes, when that happened which I have lived to see happen to many girt runners enviable once for

The fleet foot on the sill of Shade.

Consumption overtook him and cut him down in the early thirties.

But the wit that had collected so fine a staff at Newton of young teachers—suddenly, as if by a wave of the hand—and the inspiration he put into the new venture were our new Headmaster's own. I must always remember the Reverend George Townsend Warner as something of a prodigy. His education had been of Harrow and Trinity, Cambridge, where I believe he had narrowly missed his 'Blue' for cricket: a tall sanguine man in the middle years, but athletic yet, a rare runner between wickets: in school and out of it an organiser: a gentleman with every attribute of a good Headmaster save a sense of justice, of which he had scarcely a glimmer, and, being choleric, could be angriest when most unjust. He had his favourites, too

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(among whom excusably I did not reckon), and one of these, a crippled Fifth Form boy, wise beyond his years, half-innocently procured me a night of torture. I had spent a half-holiday at Torquay and was coming back in some glee nursing a first edition of *The Bab Ballads* (bought for 6d. in Mr Iredale's bookshop) when at Torre Station the door of my compartment opened and P— jumped in with a meerschaum pipe which he smoked unblushingly until we reached Newton Abbot. Now I had reached the Sixth Form, but (quite rightly) because of my unripe fourteen years had not been entrusted with 'Prefect' powers and responsibility. There was a School Concert that evening at which (for every small detail clings in memory) I had to read a page or so about the Mock Turtle in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, and P—, smelling rankly of tobacco, had nonchalantly found a seat in the front. The entertainment over, as I sat in my study, busy with a copy of Latin verses, Warner burst in, furious, commanding me to go upstairs at once and pack! I was to be expelled next morning, in presence of the whole school. His wrath drowned my pleading—if, white and shaken, I attempted any. He turned off the gas on my poor elegiacs and led the way up the staircase where on the landing he swerved aside and stormed into the Masters' Common Room, where I heard him denouncing my offence as I crept up the next flight to my bed and a night of anguish. *Ecce in dimidio*—all my hopes, and the hopes my parents were building, ruined at a stroke like a house of cards, and the prospect of breaking the news at home that I came back, expelled!

The next day (Sunday) dragged through without event, save that a burning indignation began to overtake my miserable forebodings, and I slept that night on a resolve that, whatever my fate, the passion was not going to be all on one side. I had noted, too, on coming out of Chapel, that the other masters' faces, while non-committal, showed no unfriendliness. I suspect, indeed, that one or more of

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them had hinted to the Head that he was in a way to make a fool of himself. At any rate when he sent for me on the Monday his wrath had blown over and I found my sentence commuted to 'degradation' from Sixth Form status—an unmeaning punishment, seeing that I had enjoyed none of its privileges. A short while after, news coming that I had earned distinction in some public Examination (for which by the way I had sat before my offence occurred), I was solemnly forgiven before the whole School and my status not only restored but advanced! From that day, too, Warner treated me with a particular kindness, for which I learned to be grateful, so that a queer affection still tinges my memories of him, and may be I should not have put this little incident on record. But 'the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts', and, taken with my un-resting desire—'like as the hart panteth'—to reach Oxford and skip the years between, it helps to explain why my school-days were never freely joyful. Someone has said too that 'a boy naturally demands justice, which is the last thing in this life he will ever get'.

Anyhow, and beyond a doubt under Warner's hand, miracles began and continued to happen. The School, while he kept admission none too easy, doubled and all but redoubled its numbers at incredible speed. A Chapel sprang up—of galvanised iron to be sure, yet so placed as not to be unsightly, adorned within with woodwork in sober good taste, with a small Collegiate Choir and a neat organ: two courts for squash racquets followed, two for fives, a small chemical laboratory. The hated gymnasium had its apparatus cast out and was made into two floors, class-rooms below, extra dormitories above. Then came the great enterprise, the levelling of a fair meadow for a cricket field, ample, well laid, with a pavilion overlooking it and a lovely vale. On this pitch Warner himself taught, and by example inspired some generations of cricketers: himself opening the innings of our side with our butler, the sturdy Toone, who kept the other wicket up while his

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beloved master knocked the bowling about. Another few months saw the addition of a swimming bath and the opening of a separate boarding-house under J. J. Cross, a teacher sound in Greek and Latin rudiments; a sportsman, forbye, of the country squire type which his College of Brasenose has a *genius loci* for perpetuating. We ran a School Magazine too, under the direction of another Master, R. Gifford Wood, a clergyman and a delicate English scholar, who honoured me with a friendly correspondence many years later from the Welsh parsonage of his retirement.

*On the whole one must regard the story of Newton College—unendowed, dependent only on its repute—as something of a prodigy. Time and the spread of Secondary Day Schools have conquered it, and its place knows it no more. May the finer part of its spirit help to adorn its new home with its motto too—

ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει—‘The Truth shall make you Free.’

It is pleasant to record that my old Headmaster’s ability was inherited in their several ways by his two sons, both schoolfellows of mine. George, the elder, went on to Harrow, thence to Jesus College, Cambridge, where in time he became Fellow; thence back to Harrow and a housemastership; in his work reputed as a historian, in his leisure as a dry-fly fisherman. Robert (‘Bertie’) won a scholarship at Winchester, and, in due course, at New College. Of Winchester he wrote, forty years ago, a little book,¹ which all Wykehamists may well treasure. From Oxford and the Middle Temple he proceeded to the legal side of the Board of Education, and so to being quite a distinguished senior on the Development Commission. He died (I believe) unmarried: but the writings, especially the poems, of George’s daughter, Miss Sylvia Townsend Warner, perpetuate—with a curious turn as often happens—the mental distinction of a family.

¹ *Winchester*, by R. Townsend Warner. (Handbooks to the Great Public Schools.) London, George Bell, 1900.

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In my last year at Newton two things befell; one of which might have changed the current of a growing boy's ambition, and the other, which happened as it were casually, fixed its direction for life. Warner had hit on the happy inspiration of engaging the venerable William Pengelly, F.R.S., to come over from Torquay on Saturdays to talk to us on geology and its wonders: and Pengelly (it turned out) was a native of Looe near Polperro, and had caught his first enthusiasm for natural science from my grandfather. Noting the attention of a red-headed boy on the front row—or perhaps some facial resemblance teased his memory—he asked my name, and learning that I was a grandson of Jonathan Couch, took me into special favour. We made one or two half-holiday excursions together before he asked Warner's leave to carry me off to Torquay for a week-end, to initiate me into the mysteries of Kent's Cavern, the exploration of which and sifting out of its prehistoric remains had become the passion of his remaining years. Warner refused: my line was Classics, and I was to try for a Scholarship at Winchester.

Warner was right—even though with his magnificent carelessness he forgot to enter my name in time for the Winchester adventure. I think it more than doubtful that, with my backwardness in Greek verse, I should have succeeded there: it is certain that I had no genuine talent for natural science.

But, one afternoon's 'leave', this short-lived craze for geology took me up to a certain White Rock near Ogwell at the head of the beautiful Bradley Woods. I had not to climb far before collecting a number of fine 'madrepores' (fossilised corals) and, with time on my hands, I strolled back beside the stream and started afresh upon my ever fascinating game of whittling, rigging and launching bits of wood, wagering on their careers as I followed them down—as thousands of boys have done all over the world. I am sure, too, that the beauty of Bradley Woods had insensibly haunted me for a year or two; since, without

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knowing why, I had so often made for them and solitude. But that afternoon, as I leant on the rail of a foot-bridge, and on the point of following my small fleet as it passed out of sight on smooth water-slide, I happened to glance up on my right and was met by a Vision. 'Twas of nothing more (reduced to simplest terms) than sunlight slanting down a broad glade between two woodlands that drowsed in the summer heat. But it held me at gaze while the mere beauty of it flooded into my veins, and the mysterious bliss of it shook my young body. Also, when I came to recall the scene, a deep silence held it: the water slid without noise under the footboards, no note of bird broke the afternoon hush. But this may have been a later fancy.

The reader may smile, thinking that I make far too much of a very trivial experience: but, after all, this is my book and must record experiences on the scale of their importance to my own life.

Up to that moment I dare say the beauty of the world about me had been as pleasant to me as to most boys—probably with more awareness than to most, because of my father's indoctrinating love of poetry. (*Flumina amem silvasque inglorius* was the motto engraved on his fishing-reel.) But it had been, if I remember, concerned only with the *phenomena* of Nature, things picturesque, 'sketchable', taken for granted. This, however, was, if not a revelation, at least a wondering surmise, almost an assurance, of a beauty behind all phenomena; active through them, immanent, beneficent.

I believe, looking back, that this apprehension finally chased away those religious terrors which had beset me so miserably. Anyhow, it has companioned me to this day, even through evil times. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.* Visions thus penetrating have their reaction, certainly for one doomed to be a writer, in an ache to express the inexpressible: and it will be seen later that, even had the germ of poetic expression been born in me, circumstance and the daily task

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have forbidden that concentration on severe practice without which (I am convinced) no poetry can sustain more than brief lyrical flights if it would be (as the mere effort proves) what it would desire to be.

Nevertheless, I can claim that poetry, though without power of expression, has consort with me through life. As spirit is attracted to spirit no less surely than matter to matter, so, for an instance, I am one with Wordsworth beside the Wye, or, for another, with Browning's David, as memory retraces my way back that afternoon to the School tea-bell.

There were witnesses, cohorts about me...

And the little brooks witnessing murmured persistent and low
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—'E'en so, it is so!'

But it is time to drop back to earth. The attempt upon Winchester having missed fire, it was decided that I should try for a scholarship at Clifton. But in the meantime I must sit (Heaven knows why, unless in hope to add to Newton's list of 'successes') for an Oxford Certificate Examination which I suppose to have been some remote ancestor of the now general School Leaving Certificate. The venue was Oxford: at fourteen I beheld the City of my young desire, which it surpassed. My lodgings lay at the near-end of Walton Street, nearly opposite to Worcester College, into the beauties of which—for it was Long Vacation—a kindly Porter admitted me. I shall say no more of those enchanted three or four days save to correct with fact a small incident in a story of mine, *The Ship of Stars*. Actually I was standing at gaze in the empty Broad Walk of Christ Church, my imagination peopling it with the crowd described in *Tom Brown at Oxford* as parading there on Commemoration Sunday, when two elderly clergymen emerged from the Meadow Gate, halted on some kindly instinct to question me, and made me share their walk by the river, the College Barges (naming each for my eagerness), and so up beside Cherwell. The real

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figures in that gracious episode were two Canons of Christ Church—Bright and Edward King, afterwards famous Bishop of Lincoln; the latter converted in my novel into the even more famous and perhaps equal in saintliness (he couldn't be saintlier)—John Ruskin.

My companions on this Oxford sally were two brothers, Edmund and Cyril Cobb, the three of us under escort of their father, the late James Cobb, author of that immensely popular tale *The Watchers on the Longships* and other books for the young. The elder brother, weakly in health at school, died many years ago. The younger followed me to Oxford, was a stout oar at Merton and thence pursued a distinguished career, from the Bar to Chairmanship of the London County Council, Parliament, and a knighthood. The day's examination over, we played, dived, swam in Merton Street Baths—a proprietary resort which had faded out in 1882 when I sought its place in vain. I remember also the night journey back to Devon. Mr Cobb had bespoken a luxurious compartment from Didcot, and on our settling down, produced from a satchel a number of books. To me—a lucky one—he handed a copy of Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* (newly published), which beguiled me after all the others had dropped asleep.

The tangible result for me of this excursion was a *testamur* on a piece of parchment or paper which the event never required me to use: for within a short while I was in the train again, travelling up to Clifton.

III

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LAST of all came the drive from the station to the School. It was at first uninteresting: but presently the drowsy-paced cab emerged from a terrace into the glare of a wide white road, which at first descended by a gentle slope. On the left side of it stood a row of substantial houses taking the sun comfortably on their backs among lilacs and laburnums: on the right was a long range of black paling with a guard of netting above it, and behind both a line of young lime trees. Even now, while the leaves still hid the view from him, he heard again and again the sweet crack of bat on ball: then as he drew level and looked between the trees he saw that which took his breath with an entirely new delight. In the distance were buildings—in front lay a wide green sward, level as a lawn, flooded with low sunlight, and covered in every direction with a multitude of white figures, standing, running, walking, throwing, batting—in every attitude that can express the energy or the expectancy of youth.... At the second glance something broke over his spirit like a wave: he took it for the tide of joyful anticipation, but I think it was more than that—the inrush of an idea, the sudden perception, however vague and distant, of the meaning of the scene: a glimpse, behind the mere beauty of the white young figures shining so coolly in the slant evening sunlight, of the finely planned order and long-descended discipline they symbolised... and my vision of Clifton Close is not a merely individual experience. It is a touch, a password between all those who have seen it. My friend and contemporary Quiller-Couch emphasised this when he humorously suggested that I must have borrowed my rhapsody from him. He wrote to me after reading it. 'But was it you or I, who heard the crack of bat on ball and caught his breath at first sight of the Close? It was I, Sir, and here I catch you a-hugging one of my best memories.'

SIR HENRY NEWBOLT, *The World as in My Time*.

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What a Bank is friendship!—to be drawn upon here for the best part of a page's relief from writing about myself. But to resume—

So and not otherwise I was trundled down the slope of College Road and unloaded with my Gladstone bag and a letter of introduction at the portal of No. 34 (Brown's house); and the trouble began. The maid who answered the bell looked me over and my bag suspiciously, eyed the envelope I presented, and, after a pause during which she was obviously weighing me up as over-young for a licensed hawker or commercial tout, gazed after the retreating hansom. 'Did you come in that? Well I must see about it.' With this dark utterance she disappeared. A long pause: then female voices in the passage, and the maid reappeared followed by a lady, my opened letter in her hand. 'I am sorry', said the lady, 'but there seems to be some mistake about this. We were not expecting you: but my husband is at a Masters' Meeting and may be back at any moment.'

I was shown into the drawing-room to await his return. It had, after the Victorian fashion, a round central table with a number of expensively illustrated books spread out fan-wise upon it. After a while I took courage to handle one of these—Whymper's *Scrambles Among the Alps*—and was lost in its pages when I heard the front door open, an explanatory voice (female) in the hall, and then, as a French stage-direction might put it, *détonation à la cantonade*—'What! *What* is this you're saying? Murder! I'll have none of him!' (More gentle expostulation.) 'Oh, very well—But I won't have this creature from Heaven knows where contaminating the morals of my boys! Since you've admitted him, my dear, you'll just have to put up with him as one of the family!...' I dare say it is in afterthought that I connect this with the immediate impression of a choleric mariner's return to a home surprised, and the apparition of T. E. Brown 'half-parson and half-skipper' bushy 'with old-world whiskers'

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as the drawing-room door burst open and I confronted him, standing and trembling, Whympers in hand. A dreadful pause followed, and then in a strangely softened voice, which I shall always remember for its music, 'Are you fond of climbing?'—and when I confessed that I knew nothing about it, but wanted to—'Ah, but no Switzerland for you yet! When the time comes, you must begin on Cumberland.' Thus was I admitted into the family circle. Miss Dora Brown, at that time a small child, is good enough to remember the visitor as 'pale, smiling, clever, very quiet.... I remember very few boys who ever stayed with us, but Q stands out in my memory, though I don't think he ever spoke to us children.' I don't remember smiling or being clever: but the reader will admit I had every reason to be pale and very quiet.

Early next morning there came a tap at my door and the voice of my host enquiring, 'Would I like to get up and take an early walk?' I dressed in a hurry, and we went out together upon Durdham Downs:

...by the Avon's side,
Where tall rocks flank the winding tide,
There come when morning's virgin kiss
Awakes from dreams the clematis
And every thorn and briar is set
As with a diamond coronet.

As we walked and I drank in the beauty of the morning scene, all fresh as it was novel, Brown swung round upon me with 'I come here every morning before breakfast. Why, d'ye think? You're taking me for a high and dry old scholar, I suppose? But I come out here to make *poetry*'; adding very shyly and whimsically ('jus' the shy'), 'Yes, yes, to make poetry—or try—if you'll believe it.' Thereafter and for the rest of my stay he treated me with a consideration so quiet and pleasant, so easy yet attentive, that a most distinguished visitor could not have demanded more.

The Scholarship duly won, my start as a Cliftonian

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proved scarcely more auspicious. My box of books and small study adornments had arrived from Newton ahead of me. I had been assigned to Dakyns House and in School to the 'Sixth', with a term on probation before being entrusted with Prefect's (Praepostor's) power and privileges. Now after my first morning in School—where the masters considerably allowed the newcomer to sit as spectator without calling on him to construe—I returned to House to find a throng of boys gathered around the notice-board. They made room for me, grinning, and I read this announcement pinned on a half-sheet of notepaper:

The House is reminded that Corinthian embellishments consort ill with its tradition of Doric austerity. H.G.D.

While I stared at this, not comprehending at all, someone kindly enlightened me. It referred to a pair of cheap curtains (the gift of a by-no-means Corinthian aunt) which my study-mate and I had dug out of my play-box in the 'break' and hitched up in some innocent pride. Needless to say I ran and pulled them down; hardly heedful that I did so with tears of boyish impotent rage: and indeed I would suppress the incident as quite trivial had it not at a stroke affected all my time at Clifton, turning the eager acolyte into an angry precocious critic slow to learn better.

I was a fool, no doubt, but pardonably, not yet knowing my Dakyns; and he, to say the least of it, had acted thoughtlessly. Had he sent for me—a newcomer and awkwardly placed by promotion straight into the Sixth—a few words in private might have earned my instant devotion. As it was in time the incident grew into a false, but credible, legend that he had greeted my arrival with a hit in the stomach. But here for explanation let me quote my old friend O. F. Christie's *History of Clifton College*, 1860–1934:

Dakyns was at Clifton for nearly thirty years, and when he retired many just tributes were paid to his devotion, his brilliant teaching, his literary enthusiasm, and his inexhaustible vigour. He will be even longer remembered for his volcanic outbursts....

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'In Dakyns' form-room', a Clifton Master has written, 'missiles as heavy as the big Liddell and Scott might easily descend on the inattentive; epithets as unsavoury as Θεόπυστος might shame the unwilling, but no one was ever dull there.' The School Marshal came in to his form-room one morning with School notices, and found Dakyns kneeling in front of a boy and praying Almighty God to grant the boy a ray of intelligence. To another trying pupil he exclaimed: 'Would that you were under the green sod and that I were dancing a can-can on your grave!' Such were his wild spirits, his eccentricities. Few took them amiss, for all recognised that Dakyns was Dakyns.

Yes: but a new boy of scarcely twenty-four hours' standing could hardly have surmised all this. The late Roger Fry (O.C.) wrote of this unpredictable man:

He did not produce the particular effect of dignity, and this because he played for the highest stake in life. He began by throwing away all the advantages of his position, the advantages of learning, culture, everything that might inspire respect or awe, and then he gave himself away as well. I do not think that he ever failed to win what he played for so recklessly, the love of everyone he came across.

I was not such a fool that I failed to recognise, and soon, Dakyns's essential kindness, or to admire those qualities in him which Fry tells us he so recklessly hazarded. Years afterwards, when he had long retired and I revisited Clifton as a grown man, he sought me out at my hotel and we talked for an hour or more as two old friends with open breasts. Yet I was a fool, and worse, as time went on, to let aloofness scarf over the young wound: worse, because it hardened to a daily ungrateful acceptance of benefit. All the while, moreover, I was aware of the growing immensity of my debt: to the Headmaster himself (J. M. Wilson) for one, and those hours in the Sixth Form room with the *Gorgias* and *Republic* that made me a Platonist for life; to Norman Moor, gracefulest of scholars, who set me on the way (had not fate intervened) of making myself a considerable Latinist, and whose delicate aversion from the second rate, happening even in an admired author,

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moved me to record that he taught the Sixth by the timely use of an infectious yawn; to G. H. Wollaston (the 'Woolly Bear'), science master, great of body and heart, who to our amazement sought out three of us from the Classical Sixth and invited us to his house on certain evenings that 'purely for the good of our souls' we might learn Italian enough to read Dante; to Sidney Irwin, whose little volume of School Addresses, with its appendix of noble sentences from wise men of old—

Pia et humilis inquisitio veritatis
Per sanas patrum sententias studens ambulare

has been for me a stand-by through many years, corrective, always, too seldom consulted. To Irwin I went with my essays, and he, of his fastidious taste, would drip bitter astringent honey on their flowers of style. 'But let us reduce all that to its meaning', or 'I don't doubt what you say or that it has earned an honest living in its time, still...'. In time the rebukes became gentler. In particular I remember how once, lifting his eyes from a too facile passage of mine, he quoted to me, sideways and softly:

These things, Ulysses,
The wise bards also
Behold and sing:
But oh what labour!
O prince, what pain!

For certain a high proportion of these Clifton masters were 'characters'. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that we boys considered most of them more than a little mad; suspected even that John Percival—first Headmaster and tutelary Father of our aims and ends—had chosen and collected his staff for their various eccentricities, wisely, because while they made teaching vivid, provocative, amusing, he could always control them to a common purpose and tradition. Under that compelling will of his, backed in some measure by irascibility, masters and boys had so conspired to plant and foster tradition that within

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twenty years of its foundation the *ethos* of Clifton had rooted itself as firmly as though Clifton had stood for centuries; and its main characteristics were freedom and curiosity of mind tempered by a severe conscience in all matters of service and duty, with a yet severer discouragement of any tendency in the individual to 'side' or swagger.

Some short while ago (1942) my friend Mr A. L. Rowse, of All Souls College, Oxford, started a controversy by a letter to *The Times* arraigning our Public Schools on the ground that they cultivated character at the expense of intelligence. I distrust the generalisation: for how to separate character from intelligence seems to me an impossible problem. At any rate I shall not attempt it. I can only bear testimony that—my own working time spent almost entirely upon Greek and Latin—I was all the while sensible that I shared with others a certain mental *curiosity* that belonged to Clifton as properly as the fresh air breathing off Durdham Downs. For evidence more convincing than mine, however, let me record that the 'Natural Science' side (with which I had not even a bowing acquaintance) was in my time presided over by A. M. Worthington who had recently followed Sir W. A. Tilden and was succeeded by W. A. Shenstone, all Fellows, or Fellows-to-be, of the Royal Society: and I think the odds are against any suggestion that these men were likely to undervalue the training of intelligence.

Indeed, having spent (as will be told in its proper place) a large share of my time during twenty years and more of middle life in fighting for Secondary Schools, and even taken no small share in the founding of twenty, I may claim some awareness of their aims and possibilities, together with some right to deplore the haste of their teachers and ex-pupils to attack the Public Schools, the regiment and liberties of which had largely, so far as applicable to day-boys, served as models for their own constitution.

To resume my story. Although the rebuff and resent-

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ment of that first morning condemned me to be a critic and utterly forbade the ardent devotion that has shone in the recorded memories of many Old Cliftonians—my friends and contemporaries, Sir Henry and Sir Francis Newbolt for instance, and another of them Mr O. F. Christie, the School's historian—my *respect* for Clifton grew, deepened, and has been deepening as from year to year I have regretted my stubbornness as a sin of ingratitude. The one fault in its system which I can still plead as justifying my rebel soul was its fierce and incessant alternation of work and games, games and work, with too little room left for the individual life to develop. We were caught up in a cult of Roman stoicism and service suffused with Christianity; and some of us suffered. But this, too, resulted in some fine by-products—notably an Arnoldian consciousness of moral responsibility (too precocious perhaps) with a certain puritan scorn of defilement in conduct or speech. There could hardly have been, by instinct through habit, a *cleaner* School in England.

Non equidem invideo, miror magis, the detail in which some of my contemporaries in their Memoirs trace for us their inward development from childhood through adolescence. For me the process remains very much a haze and in no way remarkable anyhow. In the holidays rather than at Clifton I began (if the term be allowed) to 'find myself': scribbled verses—but I had begun on this with weak imitations of Shelley at Newton—had a passing ambition to be an actor, and with a friend C.S., an undergraduate at Cambridge, raised an amateur company and inflicted our precocity upon audiences who came and applauded—possibly on much the same excuse as Dr Johnson allowed for wonder at performing dogs. At any rate they came, and at any rate a number who didn't were the happier for our efforts, the not inconsiderable receipts being distributed among the poor of the Borough. C.S. and I read much together too, *In Memoriam* and *Prometheus Unbound* for instance—walked much, fished, bathed, skated (the

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winter holidays being much colder in that decade than for fifty years after), solemnly discussed politics, religion, the descent of man, the prospects of a future life, etc., just such things as two average intelligent youths discuss, I suppose, as friendship opens the bud of the heart. C.S. meant much to me in those days. He was a fair pianist and would play to my moods; or again we would challenge one another to a gallop on the old and deserted Bodmin racecourse, he having a call on the posting stable which belonged to his family business and I on a roan cob—a present to my father from a grateful patient. This little mare, a plodder between shafts, took on an entirely new disposition when released to the saddle; apparently renewing a frolic of youth and, with it, a pretty turn over banks.

This friendship with C.S. ended some years later and for me almost tragically in a small way. Our ways of life had lain separate for some years. On leaving Cambridge he had become a solicitor and opened a practice in our native town, while fate had taken me from Oxford to London and the writing of one or two moderately successful books. Driven back to Cornwall (as I shall tell in its place) by illness through overwork, I made a journey to find C.S., dug him out of his office and suggested our taking one of our favourite walks, by the woods where the whortleberry had followed the anemone, and on past Tredethy to the river in which we had once bathed and fished. For some reason—it may be that through absence his love had perished of mere inanition, or may be of his habitual self-distrust, he supposed that I had somehow passed beyond his sphere (save the mark)—his heart had closed as an oyster. My eager questions he met with formal answers in stilted words, if at this or that turn of the road the familiar landmark recalled to me some trivial incident and I jogged his memory, he assented after a pause, without gusto. It was an unhappy, leaden walk, and we finished it almost in silence, uncelebrated even by a drink. We parted at the door of his office from which we

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had started and he hurried off; being due, as I afterwards learned, to take out for a stroll his old father, to care for whom, and to the neglect or ignoring of his own affairs, he devoted his days. I knew nothing of this at the time, however, but took the train home in some resentment, asking myself, vainly, if or how I had invited this sad close of a friendship once so intimate. Some years later I made a second journey, this time to attend his funeral. He had predeceased his father, after all.

In the days of our companionship on one holiday afternoon we had ridden down together to Lerryn, a village at the head of a creek on the Fowey river, where a friend had invited us to join in shooting a seine some two miles below. With boat, gear, and a couple of villagers we dropped down on the first ebb of a spring tide. The time of year was late summer, the water smooth as glass; over it the woods hung, their lower branches leaning, here and there dipping a frond to touch or make a ripple. For a second time that drenching sense of beauty which had poured over me on the bridge under Bradley Woods, mastered and took possession of me. At the time I merely felt that here, divided from my forefathers' old home for generations by a ridge or two of ground, was a wonder that belonged to me, an inheritance hitherto hidden, even now vaguely expanding in surmise. The shooting and hauling of the seine that afternoon are a blur in my memory: and I am pretty sure that I rode home beside C.S. in silence. We were friends enough then to accept one another's silences.

It was not until many years later that Professor Loth¹ published his discovery—now generally accepted and indeed irrefragable—that these woods, or rather their ancestors, had been the actual scene of the greatest of love stories, of Tristan and Iseult. I know now, or think I know, the exact site of King Mark's palace of Lantyne, of Iseult's trial by fire, and so on. But to be brief, and lest the reader

¹ *Contributions à l'Étude des Romans de la Table Ronde*, par J. Loth. Paris. Librairie Ancienne. H. Champion, Editeur, 1912.

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should hastily decide that I am romancing about the spell that afternoon has laid on my life (for there seems even to me some magic mixed up in this trivial tale), let me disengage some subsequent facts from any likeness to dream.

Soon afterwards—in the same summer holidays, if my memory serves—C.S. and I went down to Fowey where my enchanted river opens to its harbour and the Channel: he to be coached for Cambridge by an old schoolmaster there, I for the benefit of the sea air, having, as it was supposed, outgrown my strength. We had separate lodgings: mine by good fortune above the Old Post Office, then served by an elderly lady with the mien and high manners of a duchess. I found that Mrs Gould had prepared for me a very attractive bedroom overlooking the street, and gave her a shock by asking, I hope not impolitely, if it were possible to exchange this for some other which, however small and bare, looked upon the harbour. After some motherly demur she showed me to a garret, austere indeed, but scrubbed and clean, under the roof-window of which, on a deal table, I laid out my few books, and in particular a large paper-covered Orelli's *Tacitus*. This I spread open, placed three pencils in the joint of the pages, and went out to seek a boat.

That night before undressing I stood long and gazed on the harbour, the track of the moon on its water, the riding lights of two or three small schooners at anchor in the shadow of the farther shore, and decided that this were no bad place in which to live. And that is all I need say here of my first acquaintance with the upper and lower reaches of an estuary the tides of which time has since woven so close into the pulse of my own life that memory cannot now separate the rhythms.

And here or hereabouts (as I gather by studying the memoirs of several contemporaries) should follow some account of my mental development—for what that was

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worth—in those adolescent years. But fortunately I remember little or nothing about this, and so am spared attempting a task of a kind of writing at which I am inexpert—so inexpert indeed that much of this book hitherto has been written against the grain, since by habit I prefer to write of other people and of these objectively.

Let it be enough to say, then, that as school-work I used a good amount of Greek and Latin, and spent much of the small leisure Clifton allowed, in the School Library, there slaking or attempting to slake an insatiable thirst for poetry with draughts from the blameless conduits supplied by the Reverend George Gilfillan, editor. There, too, I ransacked a whole set of bound volumes of *The Saturday Review*, and picked up a taste for smart writing (afterwards chastened) with some inklings of critical method. Also, of course, I dabbled in verse: won among others the school prize for a poem on *Athens* (of all impossible subjects!): edited *The Cliftonian*, and so began a friendship to last through his life with J. W. Arrowsmith, its publisher. I think it was that exemplary citizen who infected me with something of his love for Bristol, the old bookshops and quays of which I haunted in hours of liberty during my last school year. To conclude this brief recital—in cricket and Rugby football I took my part with more fervour than skill: and in the 'Long Penpoll' (a steeplechase of 10 miles and some furlongs) won my House Cup to my own and everybody's surprise.

Then, early in 1882, I went to Oxford to compete for a scholarship in the Exeter and Trinity group.

IV

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I

SOME evenings later I found myself in the rooms of a Balliol friend, an Old Cliftonian, in a company hilariously listening while our host read out poem after poem from *Heptalogia*, then recently published. My paper-work had finished that afternoon, and fate could be put out of mind. The reader, whose voice had several times been choked with mirth, laid down the book, took up another slim volume and hushed us as he declaimed the wonderful chorus from *Atalanta in Calydon*.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night—

with the rush of it, written when the oldest among us was an infant in arms—so long the mere musical spell of Swinburne had lasted.

I was breakfasting next morning, again in Balliol, when word came round from Trinity that the dons there wished to interview me. ‘Hullo child!’ said one of the party. ‘They’re going to give you that scholarship.’ I hardly dared to hope, but it was so. I had put down Trinity as my first choice, if for no better reason than that John Percival was its President, and the alternative would have meant disloyalty to Clifton, where idolatry had already begun to exalt its late Headmaster into a demigod. Yet my heart had been divided: for Exeter, with all its noble West Country tradition, happened also to be Head of the River, and with a famous eight that had won the ‘Grand’

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at Henley; and I had a burning ambition to become a good oar.

Although the first days of my freshman's term meant so much to me, with its release at length from school bondage, its sense of a goal achieved, with an accompanying sense of being at length a man, sole possessor of one's own goods and chattels and privacy within his own 'oak'—

*Est aliquid quocunque loco quocunque recessu,
Unius sese dominum fecisse lacertae—*

these emotions, shared no doubt by countless undergraduates in their time, the reader will take for granted. But my luck was in from the start. Before Hall on the evening of my arrival I reported, as enjoined, to the Dean ('Archie' Robertson, afterwards Bishop of Exeter), who welcomed me on a footing at once easy and elder brotherly, though his questions and advice were paternal enough. I can see him at this moment, across the table a wise and kindly scholar, framed against books that reached to the ceiling; in manner more than in words imparting the very atmosphere of the place. For Trinity in these days—a small College of some seventy undergraduates—was above all things a community of friends: of which, an hour later, I had a second assurance. We freshmen dined on that night at an island table set along the middle of Hall and were joined by three or four seniors who had come up for the tail of the Vacation to read in the quiet of Oxford at that season. Fortune gave me a seat beside one of these—now known to fame as Sir Michael Sadler, his own distinctions enhanced through parentage of a distinguished son—but for me then yet more of a demigod—a third-year man, pride and hope of Rugby and (to cap all) President of the Union. Yet, as it were casually and without condescension, or more than that of an elder brother, he drew into our talk another senior man on his right and presently the two together were advising me on small practical matters such as furniture, choice of tradesmen, etc., all uncon-

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sciously suggesting the words I afterwards took, and still take in my own thought for the motto of Trinity College, Oxford—*Fraternitatem diligite*.

And so to one's room, and with a long evening ahead: for in those days we dined at 6 p.m.—a custom not without its advantages, although to a later age it may sound barbarous. It allowed a long spell before bedtime for work if you were a reading man and chose to sport your oak, and even so as a rule after an interval with coffee and anchovy toast in a friend's room, a stroll around the garden with him or in the Summer Term a game of tennis before dusk fell, or again, once or twice a week, a small wine party, these 'wines' being quite decorous affairs. A waiter would come round to your table in Hall with your name scribbled in a list (say) of a dozen under the invitation 'Mr So-and-so has the pleasure of asking Mr — to take Wine in his rooms at 7.15', and you ticked off your acceptance or regret. At 7.15 you sat down to a frugal dessert, with choice of port, sherry or claret. After a glass or two, pipes were lit, or cigars (cigarettes not being yet in fashion), and soon the company dispersed to their 'lawful occasions', as Great Tom announced 9 o'clock, tolling out its hundred-and-one strokes over town and University from Christ Church tower. Luncheons would happen less formally. You heard your name called underneath your window and rose to be greeted by a friend in mid-quad. 'Come to lunch you?' 'Right, with pleasure.' 'What shall I order?'—meaning your own meals to be sent to his rooms. 'Commons of cold beef and tankard of beer', or whatever you fancied: and this with your own commons of bread and butter would duly be served at your host's table with his other guests and their several choices.

Idle as the above digression may seem, and its details trivial, I have not wandered into it quite without purpose. It may recall to some old survivors of Oxford in the eighties—to Trinity men especially—some pleasant observances we then took for granted but time has let slip

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as the tendency of Colleges to enlarge their numbers and boundaries dissipated something of the old domestic life. Yet this again was ruled by small formalities. A senior called on you with his visiting card and you returned the call with yours—proud advertisement of arrival at man's estate or, as Sir Thomas Browne might have put it, your abbreviated *toga virilis*. In the matter of dress, too, we tended to be far more punctilious than is the undergraduate of to-day. On Sundays we paid our calls in morning dress, carrying gloves and top-hatted. Even so, my scout viewed and deplored our decadence from the days when Albert Edward Prince of Wales at Christ Church set the general Sunday fashion of frock-coats and white waistcoats. We had our customary *tabus* too: one, for example, forbidding us to cross the High in rowing or running 'shorts'. Members of the Eight or the Torpid went down to the river in ordinary dress and changed in the College Barge, junior oarsmen crossed the Sacred Way in long flannels and rowed in them.

I mention one more triviality, and this also with a purpose. For the last three years of my undergraduate life to my joy and pride I inhabited the set of rooms (on the staircase then numbered vii now xiv) which had once been inhabited by John Henry Newman, and of which he comes in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* to tell of his final parting from Oxford:

I called on Dr Ogle, one of my very oldest friends, for he was my private Tutor when I was an Undergraduate. In him I took leave of my first College, Trinity, which was so dear to me, and which held on its foundation so many who had been kind to me both when I was a boy, and all through my Oxford life. Trinity had never been unkind to me. There used to be much snapdragon growing on the walls opposite my freshman's rooms there, and I had for years taken it as the emblem of my own perpetual residence even unto death in my University.

The snapdragon still grew there during my tenancy and, for anything I know, may flourish there yet. But some

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fifty years after I in turn had 'gone down', it occurred to one or two enthusiasts to suggest that a number of us long-parted friends should meet and for a week-end in the Long Vacation foregather in the old haunts—a most dangerous experiment, or theme for a terrible short story: yet in the event happy against all warnings of good sense. I had asked as a particular favour to be put up in my old rooms, to be met on arrival and escorted by a scout with ceremony and conducted to the wrong staircase. 'The late Cardinal Newman's rooms, Sir, visitors quite often ask to be shown them.' Whereupon I felt justifiably aggrieved. For had I not been patient, especially in Eights Week, under relays of these pilgrims? Had not the Cardinal himself (or so my old scout, Ray, assured me) confirmed the tradition when in February 1875, revisiting Oxford after 32 years' absence for the first and last time, he sought back to No. VII Staircase to refresh his eyes with the panelled keeping-room, its two windows and the faithful flower on the wall? Had I not (on the same authority) even inherited his Eminence's painted wooden bedstead and tin bath? And that I should have my piety so rudely reminded that here it can count on no abiding city!—And why? Every College in Oxford and in Cambridge must keep current lists of its rooms and their tenants. Then why not file and preserve these records? We at the scholars' table sat under a portrait of the great Chatham; in my later College of Jesus, Cambridge, somewhere lodged Cranmer; Colleges ever have been the kindly nurseries of great men. They may yet foster some not unworthy successors: and the undistinguished many would be none the worse for knowing what stairs their famous brothers had trodden, within what doors prepared themselves for their high destinies.

The good and great of contemporary Oxford I could only admire at a distance of course. Among the most familiar to my view was Jowett, famous Master of Balliol, as every morning he crossed the quad beneath my bedroom window for his early trot around Trinity garden; a

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notable figure—small, rotund, fresh of face as a cherub, yet with its darting gait and in its shortish swallow-tailed coat curiously suggestive of a belated Puck surprised by dawn and hurrying to

hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

But I carried in mind a far more serious picture of him. This was as looking down from the gallery of St Mary's on my first attendance at the University Sermon, I saw him enter in his robes as Vice-Chancellor, the Bedels with the maces of gilt and silver escorting him and then as he sat and listened with face blandly upturned to the pulpit: and in the pulpit stood Richard Church, Dean of St Paul's, delivering his funeral oration over his friend Dr Pusey, recently dead. Young as I was and ignorant of the controversy in its details—the starving of the Regius Professorship, the strife over *Essays and Reviews* and so on—I knew that I was witnessing its dismissal, the closing scene ennobled alike by its setting, by the silent dignity president over the assembly and by the preacher's restrained and exquisitely tempered eloquence.

In this autumn of 1882 the 'aesthetic movement' had—in Oxford at any rate—almost run itself out of breath: while Pre-Raphaelite enthusiasm was fading almost with famous Union frescoes, and in Oxford the neo-Gothic craze in architecture had lost its edge so far that the ordinary rowing man passing on his way to Christ Church meadow would gaze at Butterfield's annexe (since happily erased) and wonder what the authorities of Merton were going to do about it and when:

The Fashions change, for change is dear to men.

So far as a light-weight enthusiast for the oar could spare time to commune with the 'intellectuals' of those days, poetry and the arts for a while gave place in discussion to philosophy (notably that of T. H. Green) and social philanthropy—*The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, Toynbee

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Hall, the crusades of W. T. Stead, etc.—a backwash from the prophetic preachings of Carlyle and Ruskin. Ruskin himself came back to us; to walk the street in velvet 'square' and blue double-breasted frock-coat; to revive veneration rather than the ardours of an earlier time; to lecture once or twice and finally to collapse in face of a sorrowful audience. But we undergraduates held meetings and started missions in dire tracts of London—in such places as Bethnal Green and Stratford. We gathered to listen to C. T. Studd and his cricketer missionaries from Cambridge. Some few, even of the rowdies, left our company to join the Salvation Army, renouncing all.

What we the lighter-hearted did not renounce was the charm of the place: that Oxoniolatry, if you will, which Swinburne had scoffed at. But Swinburne was rapidly becoming less and less to us, being obviously spent as a poet, while not yet nursed and watered up to his second flowering as a critic. Even so I doubt if in either class we should have placed him alongside Matthew Arnold: for we kept *Essays in Criticism* (First Series) on the shelf nearest the armchair and his verse familiar on our lips on Sunday wandering afoot or in canoe—Sunday being our one day's release from the hard routine of the oar. As Arnold had singularly felt so he passed on to our generation the spell of the countryside around Oxford. In the track of his spirit we explored 'the warm green-muffled Cumnor hills', and when the wind had stripped them, with his eyes as we descended home in the December dusk we saw the lights of Christ Church hall shining across and along the valley floods. We knew those slopes, and we knew

...what white, what purple fritillaries
The grassy harvest of the river-fields
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields,
And what sedg'd brooks are Thames's tributaries.

Some of us, too, inherited his love of Wordsworth—I speak as one who spent his Easter Vacations climbing amid the Lakes.

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Tennyson had become too pontifical for us altogether, his lapidary art so sure of perfection as to seem dead to us young tenants of the House of Movements. We still swore by the earlier vintages of Browning; but for some years Browning had been turning out things like *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* and *The Inn Album*, with renderings of the Greek Tragedians into a lingo of his own in which, as Mr Saintsbury once put it, 'Mr Browning thought to make up for a not wholly perfect knowledge of Greek by calling a Nymph a "numph"''.¹ To put it concisely, our graceless youth voted that the poet was dining himself out. We did scant justice to the genius of William Morris. (Criticism in my opinion has not even yet begun to give his due to the poet of *Love is Enough*: of certain tales in *The Earthly Paradise*, of *The Life and Death of Jason*, perfect companion for long summer day.) It may be that for us he fell into a trough between two waves of interest, Pre-Raphaelitism subsiding, Socialism rising languidly as yet; or possibly it happened because we were learning to believe from the French that good writing ought to be difficult, and this great man whom his friends called 'Topsy' poured forth verse too easily.

Pater was with us, but as a god resting—as it turned out, as a god drawing to the close of a long rest between two avatars. The *Renaissance* dated back to 1873; *Marius* was to break upon us, a thing of beauty, in 1885. In 1883-4 a small literary club, *The Passionate Pilgrims*, used to hale him from his rooms in Brasenose and plant him, amid our councils, upon a hearthrug with his back to the fire. There he would sit, cross-legged, with the light flickering over his baldish cranium, his moustaches pendulous in the shadow: a somewhat Oriental figure, oracular when his lips opened and he spoke, which was seldom.

Visions of other famous men attended us, if but glimpses

¹ Let us conceive Hamlet greeting Ophelia with
Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.

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only; a spectral encounter (it can hardly have been real) in the Turl with Mark Pattison in an invalid's chair: Matthew Arnold slipping through the Balliol gateway, guest or visitor of Jowett, trim side-whiskers and (alas!) lavender kid gloves duly noted:

Somewhat of worldling mingled still
With bard and sage.

'Lewis Carroll', clerical, white-choked, flitting, flitting, like a shy bird into some recess of Christ Church: Rhoda Broughton, as unlike her heroines as their waywardness her careful prose; a glimpse even (unavoidable by politeness, for her window bulged on the pavement with panes scrupulously clean), caught on the way back from an early training grind by Holywell, of the authoress's breakfast table laid for her, its silver ware gleaming against a bright fire and by the hearth a couple of pug dogs, stretched, awaiting their mistress's descent. Robert Bridges now and then honoured as a guest our high table, and we of the scholars' table whispered that this distinguished looking man was a poet; but few of us had met with any of his verse save perhaps some booklet privately printed by the Provost of Worcester in his Daniel Press.

We regarded these eminent ones with a graduated awe: but youth itself had begun to fall into step with their tradition. Beeching, Mackail, Nichols were putting forth their first essays in verse: MacColl, Mackail, Oliver Elton shaping themselves into the delicate and learned critics for which the world now knows them. Others—among whom I may dare to team myself up with Anthony Hope Hawkins, Charles Mallet, A. E. W. Mason, C. E. Montague, Henry Newbolt—were more or less consciously training themselves to become writers—Newbolt perhaps the most consciously. But none of us, I fancy, were mainly or immediately concerned with efforts in literature. Montague and I, for instance, were far more intimate as friends and rivals in Balliol and Trinity oarsmanship; Mason, on my

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own staircase, for the while practised oratory and aspired to office (which he achieved) in the Union Society, and in turn to honours in the drama, playing Heracles in the early O.U.D.S. performance of *Alcestis*. Also during an Easter we climbed together on Mickledore and Great Gable with no dawning suspicion on my part that our adventures, or some of them, were casting their shadows some years ahead and over his first literary one, *A Romance of Wastdale*.

But ('Mods' behind us) our chief intellectual concern lay in philosophy. We mourned the untimely death of Thomas Hill Green almost as a personal loss: we damned the Utilitarians from Bentham to Mill as though in some way they had been responsible for it. Also we mocked at their prose. We attempted Kant and even (in translation) Hegel, but abandoned the effort. The old Oxford demigods—Plato, Aristotle, Bacon and the rest—were our major deities, and in our discussions we chased the Absolute far into the night.

My own determination to become a writer dates—as nearly as memory can attempt to sift out a beginning from among the nebulous ambitions of youth—from an evening in the Christmas Vacation of (I think) 1883, when an old friend of the family, a retired Indian Colonel, called with a parcel of books under his arm. He had come from the yearly auction of our local book club. 'I understand that you wish to become a writer', said he, and dumped two small volumes on the table (his only authority for this surmise being that my too-fond parents had, unknown to me, caused some copies of my Clifton prize poem to be struck off in print and no doubt distributed them among their friends). 'Well', he went on, 'I have a hobby of making bets with myself upon promising authors, and among the youngsters this is the colt for my money. He has style, Sir.' I picked up Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*. Before long I had possessed myself of everything of R.L.S. in print.

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To-day in the literary reviews I seldom see the name of Robert Louis Stevenson printed but it is prefaced or followed by some disparaging remark. Well, have it as you will, my juniors. No hungry generations tread you down as yet. Also you may take the admission that our joy in him ran to excess. But for us he arrived at a happy moment. Here was a man who played with words as a master upon a fine instrument inviting us to learn:

and with a tale forsooth he commeth unto you

a tale of men and women doing things (to use the Aristotelean phrase), telling those deeds, too, in the clean objective way we were beginning to envy in the French.

About this time (January 1883) a group of 'Passionate Pilgrims' with some others started *The Oxford Magazine*, still running strong after sixty years. My friend Sir Charles Mallet, in a footnote (vol. III, p. 461 of his *History of Oxford*) gives these details of its infant days:

The *Magazine* was an undergraduate project, and among the undergraduates who helped to start it were D. S. MacColl of Lincoln (Sub-Editor), M. E. Sadler of Trinity, O. Elton of Corpus, W. H. Shaw, C. N. E. Eliot, A. H. Hawkins and C. G. Lang of Balliol. The early Editors were Dons, R. Lodge of Brasenose, who conducted it through its earliest troubles, P. E. Matheson of New College, and then Charles Cannan of Trinity, who brought in [the present writer]....

But at this point I must hark back to tell of a friendship most strong in life and now in the memory of its survivor, Charles Cannan.

No doubt it is by the reflected light of later friendship that among so many blurred and undated memories of Clifton the evening when I first saw Charles Cannan, and (more strangely) the few hours precedent, stand out for me so clear even in detail. I had been seeing off a parent at Bristol Station, and should have been sad; I was booked to make a speech before bed-time in School Debate, and should by all rule have been miserable. But something

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good was going to happen; and my spirit, on my way back to College, was elate to meet it, as my senses seemed to be unnaturally sharpened. To this day I could instruct an impressionist painter concerning the passers-by of that Saturday evening—their faces moving against the shop glare, the block of shadow by the queer statue of Neptune, the lights on the river and along the wet pavement.... School Debates took place in the Percival Library, along each side of which jutting bookcases formed a series of alcoves. Official 'Government' and 'Opposition' faced one another in two opposite alcoves, but could see very little of their audience, and that little was presumably adverse. I had fired off my speech (for the Opposition) and had been trounced for it by the Government's best stalwart, when a voice took up the argument, two alcoves away on the left, and at once commanded a hush. It was an incisive voice, with very much more than a boy's weight at the back of the blade, and it started very deliberately to carve my adversary into very small pieces. 'Who is it?' I asked. 'Hush, my dear fool—it's Cannan. Haven't you heard he's down for the week-end?' He had been head of the school four years before, had left with a scholarship at Corpus Christi College, and was back with the aura of his double-first about him. I craned forward and managed to catch his profile beyond the edge of the bookcases: a figure by no means tall, but formidable; square-shouldered, even somewhat high-shouldered; set low on the shoulders, leaning forward a little, a head that suggested a kite in the act to dive, yet doubtful if the quarry were worth the trouble. His intervention easily carried the vote; but he did not stay afterwards to speak with me, which mightily relieved the sudden and shy worshipper. I saw him once again before going up to Trinity; and his was the figure—in an old Brown's House jersey—that I followed through the pack in an O.C. Rugby game against Big Side.

We exchanged speech for the first time in Trinity, in

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the October Term of 1881. Percival had just imported him thither from Corpus; and as a Freshman I attended his first lectures on Mods. Logic, and on Juvenal. I look back on those lectures and recognise how surely they laid the foundations of a life-long faith that there are no rules for teaching; that the teacher's personal fire is the beginning and end of the art and most of its middle. Cannan's lectures were like nothing on earth, as the saying is; but they contrived to make formal logic the most absorbing chase in the world. And when your nose was fairly laid on the scent (as you supposed) he would lash out a question as with a crack of the whip, and you looked up plaintively and knew yourself for a fool. But you could console yourself: he was out to make a good pack of his material, and would have none but noble hunting. He was one of the last great Individualists the seed of whose teaching may Heaven revive!

One day, having scarified me in lecture, he waited afterwards and invited me to dine that night in his lodgings in the High—over the shop of Mr Bassett, hairdresser. The premises, as I suppose, were among those obliterated later to make room for B.N.C.'s new buildings. I remember an ample low-ceiled sitting-room lined with bookshelves, in the contrivance of which he had spent much ingenuity. The range—and the depth—of his acquaintance with our own literature fairly staggered me. He paraded nothing; but it seemed to me that between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five he had read everything. Yet I suppose no man could have deeper in grain a contempt for sciolism and all its ways; and here, too, I must remark that his zest for new discoveries had already spent, or nearly spent, itself. He had turned back and begun rereading, on a sort of system which was no system, but curiously eclectic and highly characteristic. The novels of Defoe, Peacock, Miss Ferrier, John Galt were his books now; a second dish of olives, as it were, after the feast. I would add Wordsworth, had I ever caught him reading Wordsworth in preference to

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having Wordsworth by heart. R. W. Raper, of Trinity, once lent me a copy of FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyám* (it sounds incredible, but in 1884 or thereabouts the existence of this poem was known to half a dozen men in Oxford at the most), and I took it off in my enthusiasm to try it upon Cannan; with a result against which I might have been warned by a previous effort to enlist his sympathy for the poetical works of Adam Lindsay Gordon, returned upon me with a grunt and the observation 'that the scent of Swinburne's *patchouli* more than held its own against stable manure'. Later on he appeared to confine his reading to Aristotle, the *New English Dictionary*, and any and every newspaper on which he could lay hand. (He was the only man known to me who could read a newspaper in his bath.) Yet the springs of his old literary affections would always be found, if one 'lifted the cool-haired creepers carefully', welling as clear and abundant as ever within the shade. Many years after the date which these notes have outrun—on an evening in 1899 to be exact—I looked up from correcting proofs of *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (of which, by the way, he was the onelie begetter), and said, 'Look here—what is the matter with Swinburne's *Hertha*? Your proof-reader gives it up, with a marginal note that he's unable to follow the meaning of "this poet"'. 'Well', said Cannan, 'that sounds like a criticism, any way. Now that I remember, he's a religious man, besides being wildly committed to this book.' He took up the folio and carried it off to his chair under the reading-lamp. 'What about *Hertha*?' I asked, after ten minutes or so. 'I haven't begun it', he said. He had been reading, over and over, the penultimate stanza of the Chorus from *Atalanta* which overlaps the page on which *Hertha* begins:

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night...

and he read it through again, and the final stanza, aloud, interjecting midway that with the creeping years he'd almost forgotten how good it was—'Poetry, Mr Cowch—

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poetry!’ (It was a convention that we always addressed one another formally mispronouncing the surname; as, using a like careful absurdity, we always bowed on meeting, however long the absence. It also belonged to our intimacy that we never shook hands.)

I am as sure now that his apparent nescience of contemporary literature was not a pose as that it was part of his rule of anonymity. For he always knew what any given writer was doing, and could produce at any moment—and as it were out of the void—a remarkably close estimate of what so-and-so was, or might likely be, worth. Indeed, it always turned out that, by some uncanny chance, he had met the man quite recently in the street and appraised him for the job then under discussion—‘though of course we didn’t talk about *that*’.

But I revert to the years, from 1883 onward, when Cannan was a young Fellow of Trinity, quickly appointed Dean. The College had just then, under Percival—Robinson Ellis quite unexpectedly abetting—taken the resolution to build its new and gracious quad and double its numbers. No one who has not been a party in such an experiment can realise how ticklish a business it is and how laborious for somebody. That somebody, of course, was Cannan; and—whatever was, is, or may be forgotten—Cannan more than any other carried the business through, and in the gratitude of several generations of Trinity men survives as little less than the College’s second founder. The methods by which, as Dean, he maintained discipline were (he would cheerfully confess) ‘in the main auto-schediastic, and all empirical’. Justice, human understanding, and the unexpected—these three constants might be predicated, and no fourth. Revisiting Oxford one day, some years after taking my degree, I found him gloomy and dejected. ‘This morning’, he explained, ‘for the first time in my life I gated a man. My brother has been in and says it’s time for me to retire; that I must be failing.’ Also he taught the children of Trinity the use of the loose scrum

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in Rugby football. He had supplied—anonymously as usual—no small part of the intelligence which revolutionised 'Rugger' at Oxford in the great consulship of Vassall: and, although his threatened treatise on the game ('in twelve volumes, crown 8vo') never saw the light, he communicated its first principles to a band that strove for the art rather than for 'blues'—'with results equally gratifying to the parent and to them.' The subsequent annals of Trinity on the football field have not been inglorious, and to this day, when I watch two first-class sides, some clever shade of the forward-play makes me turn involuntarily to a companion who should be sitting beside me, but is not.

One evening he broke it to me that he had been asked to take over the editorship of the *Oxford Magazine*, and had a mind to accept—if I were willing to help. A wild discussion ensued in which characteristically he chose to be less concerned with the business in hand than in devising ways to safeguard my reading for Schools. I have been much in newspaper offices since then, but have never learnt so much about running a paper as Cannan taught me while he was learning: and the simple explanation is, that he never engaged in any business, whether of work or play, without an instant and insistent sense of perfection. 'And now', said he, when his term of office approached its end, 'you and I, Sir, may accinge ourselves for a supreme effort in English composition.' The resultant editorial *L'Envoy* has since commanded the laughter of the British senate, and may outlive it: but 'composition' it certainly was; and I should be sorry to say at a guess how many experts were conjured in from the Broad (which unexpectedly teemed that afternoon with past-masters of Gibbonian prose), or recount how economically each was tapped for a felicitous phrase, and thereupon dismissed. But I seem to remember that J. E. King (afterwards Headmaster of Clifton) and I—we two only—were left when Cannan suddenly threw a leg

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over the arm of his chair and started the swan-song that begins:

But of criticism the paths are many—the voice of the *Magazine* is one, and of all editors alike this much may be said:—‘they have never hesitated to stand up for the right when they felt that public opinion was with them....’

Some years later, York Powell confided to me that Cannan was going to make the Clarendon Press ‘what it ought to be: the first Press in the world’. ‘There was only one danger’, he added, ‘and he will overcome it. He is learning to suffer fools gladly.’ It would be a sin against truth to conceal that in early days, unless you happened to enjoy a peculiar privilege, you risked being made painfully aware that he did not. A fool—and he could scent one from afar—was too fatally meat and drink to him: and after a painful scene in a railway carriage, immediately consequent on another in Cumberland, his dearest admirer once had to protest that though one of the larger Carnivora might choose to make a pet of him, he’d be shot if he made another apology or bound up the wound of another bite on that side of Bletchley.

It was understood (although in Cumberland and in the Alps he was an indomitable climber) that his health was not sufficiently robust to allow of his pleading at the Bar, where great worldly success surely awaited his particular combination of gifts. I remember also that the late Mr Walter of *The Times*, after an evening in Raper’s rooms, fastened on him for a born journalist. I think the men of my generation at Oxford, and of some succeeding ones, will agree with me that, whether or not we thought of Cannan as a great man—and that was not the light in which, if he could prevent us, we were allowed to see him—we always knew him to be a peer of the greatest.

For my part, even after trying to set apart all the prejudice and all the obligation of long friendship, I say that his was one of the finest characters I have met or heard of

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by report. At his funeral one said to me, 'If I were a party in any dispute, and the quarrel were submitted to Cannan, and Cannan gave judgement against me—why then, however sure of my cause beforehand, I should have to tell myself that, somehow, I was in the wrong.' Could better word be spoken over any man's grave?

II

With Cannan and successive groups of friends I spent three Easter Vacations at Wastdale Head in Cumberland. In the mornings we read, in the afternoons climbed alike strenuously. There was nothing to distract from this routine: indeed, when Farmer Tyson, our host, rode into Aspatria market and brought home a sirloin of beef it taxed our courtesy to combine our thanks with the earnest hope that never again would he break into the monotony of sweet mountain mutton and 'Mr Pendlebury's pudding' (known to us as 'Pendlebags'), a delicious compound of farm milk, tapioca and raisins, according perfectly with mountain air and weak whisky and water. Mr Pendlebury, though but a name to us then, was a Cambridge man famous alike as mathematician and mountaineer: 'in which latter capacity' we sometimes challenged his prowess. But for climbers a part of Lakeland's charm at Easter lies in the diversities of snow and ice on the upper fells and in the gullies which may vary the difficulty from day to day, almost as weather varies the game of boat sailing. Our feats, of course, would not for a moment compare with the dizzy achievements of to-day's experts in rock work. But we 'did' a few things to our own considerable satisfaction—on the Pillar, Great Gable, and at points on the dangerous face of Scafell from Mickledore—and took some pride in doing these without aid of rope; returning at times by help of precipitous *glissades* to dinner, another hour of reading, final talk around the hearth, then sleep to the sound of many waterfalls near and distant.

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Many of our party persevered to become notable Alpinists, one or two to achieve fame in the Caucasus or among the Andes. For me, as shall be told, this *sacer furor montium* was doomed to perish untimely: but with the consolation of some ineffable moments—of a rift, for instance, in a thick mist on Great End and far below, as through a funnel, my first view of Derwentwater, sunlit with her islands all vividly green, or from the summit of Scafell Pike a sunset mirage of the Isle of Man, as apparently near our coast, like a sherd afloat on a sea of gold without horizon draped with curtains of purple. For a boon yet more profitable these days among the fells made and left me a Wordsworthian for life.

My only other reading party took me, one Long Vacation, to Cadgwith by the Lizard, by invitation from our Senior Tutor, Franklin T. Richards. The invitation in itself took me aback: still further the terms of it. For I had scandalously neglected his lectures on Greek and Roman history, which in truth were not enlivening, devoted mainly to constitutional detail; whereas, being fatally advised that a good show of knowledge on the philosophical side of 'Greats' could secure a 'first' without troubling over the historical I had taken small interest in the Solonian credit system, even smaller in the Lex Papia Poppaea. To my surprise he suggested the *Republic*—of which in my self-conceit I supposed myself to know something—as a work we might read together with profit and enjoyment—but the event would have utterly abashed me had his far deeper knowledge not been conveyed with an unspoken friendliness that revealed even greater depths in the man himself. It shattered all my preconceived notions of him and set me wondering if this austere and stoical agnostic had not chosen the dry-as-dust subjects on which he lectured in term time, and fitted his manner to them, as a self-protective armour to cover a softness of which his reason disapproved.

We bathed together every morning at seven o'clock and

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separated—I to my rooms above the Cove, he to a cottage a short way inland up the valley, occupied by him summer after summer with his wife, young son and daughter. There I rejoined him at ten for two hours of Plato. After my evening meal I worked alone and pretty steadily until close upon midnight. Our afternoons were pure holiday, with boating my main employ, but sometimes in search for rarities among the summer flowers for the riot of which that district of Serpentine rock is famous. He started (I fancy) upon some notion of making me a botanist, but abandoned this, my case much resembling that of a late Master of Trinity who claimed to possess an ignorance of botany exactly conterminous with King Solomon's proficiency 'in that it extended from the cedar which is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall'.

From these peaceful pursuits I was enticed one day by the local doctor, an enthusiast, to take part in a cricket match, Ruan Minor *versus* Helston. I must tell of this match for other reasons and because, being ever an indifferent cricketer, that afternoon I covered myself with glory. Our team had roped in, for eleventh man, Mr Rutter, landlord of my cottage, who had never handled a bat before and (as I gathered) seldom climbed the hill to Goonhilly Downs where the lists were set. Partly owing to his unfamiliarity with the spot, distant some three-quarters of a mile from his native cove, partly perhaps to the heat of the day, we arrived in time to find that Helston had won the toss and elected to take first innings: their opening batsmen were in fact walking towards the wickets. Observing their legs, Mr Rutter picked up a pair of pads that happened to be lying around and induced them, fumbling with the straps while I exhorted him to hurry, and our captain uttered cries of impatience. 'They can't bite through these anyway', said he darkly, and went to his allotted place somewhere in the deep field.

Our opponents put up a score of 100 or thereabouts, no mean performance on a wicket that had to be faced to be

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believed, the turf lying scarcely more than skin deep on native rock crossed by the rut of an ancient wheel-track. We started, however, merrily enough thanks to one Rose (of Magdalen) who adorned an innings of 40-odd by a lovely drive past cover through both fore-windows of the bus conveying our visitors. I had joined him at fourth wicket down and had amassed, to my astonishment, some twenty runs and a comparable number of body bruises before he hit his wicket in standing back to a full toss: after which our wickets went down like skittles and left me with one to fall and eight runs lacking for victory. Mr Rutter, eleventh man, walked in firmly, received directions at which end to stand, but ignored them and walked over to me. 'They say down along', he asked me confidently, 'that you're given out if you don't move your bat.' 'Nonsense', I assured him: 'the danger is if you do.' 'Then I won't', said he, and was as good as his word; for having taken block, planted his bat firmly, and scared me by gazing around after the manner of W. G. Grace before action, he stiffened and faced the bowling—a statue of a man, pillared on those padded legs: blue jerseyed of torso, weather tanned, with silver rings in his ears. Thus he endured the remaining balls of the over. In the next he nearly ran me out through hesitating whether to bring his bat with him or to leave it: but the score crept up, a few extras aiding, and at length I achieved the winning hit with a 'three' which went in a direction not by me intended.

As we walked back amid applause and laughter (from friend and foe), I congratulated Mr Rutter, adding that I hoped he had not been badly hurt; for indeed he had been struck more than once on the body and over seventy on the knuckles without a sign of flinching. 'Oh them cricket balls', he said contemptuously. 'I don't make no account of they. Vipers I was lookin' out for all the time.... Fairly teemin' on these here Downs, I've always been told. But to oblige *you*, Sir....'

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It cannot be that the legend of my prowess so lingered among those ancient hills as to account for my receiving a dozen years later when anchored in the Helford River, a two-page telegram entreating me to come over and take part in a two days' match. I obeyed; partly no doubt to make acquaintance with a younger generation from Trinity: certainly not with any hope (or indeed result) of justifying my repute as a batsman. Yet in a most happy hour. For at the close of play on the first evening and after dinner at the inn, avoiding a 'Smoker' at the Vicarage I sought out Franklin Richards. The couple who had 'cared for' him in the old cottage were dead: his children were grown up: and he and Mrs Richards had moved to lodgings close above the cove. In the small garden there, over coffee and while I smoked, we talked of many things that did not matter being all subdued into an understanding silent and, for that hour complete, as the Channel at our feet melted, league upon league, into an embracing grey. Yet I took myself away early, perceiving his health to be frail: indeed, he was nearing his end, and knew it. I doubt, however, if this worried him at all, apart from having to leave behind some anxieties about others, as we all must.

The next afternoon at the close of play I went back to my boat on the Helford.

But the most and best part of my Long Vacations found me ever at Fowey

like faithful hound returning

for apart from the lure of the place with its boats, its bathing, its constant delights to the eye, the movements of shipping, in the life of a small town or country neighbourhood there occur, between dull intervals, some two or three happy years in which the young who had made first acquaintance at children's parties and pulled crackers around Christmas trees discover also that they have 'grown up' and take, however unconsciously, a different

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and speculative interest in one another, on the girls' part, in the friends their brothers bring home from University or London Hospital, or one of the Services: these male visitors returning the curiosity without being aware of it, at any rate to begin with. So, for three or four years it happened in our corner of the world; with, as I remember, a run of remarkable summers and the general security of life in and around Queen Victoria's first Jubilee to weave the spell within which we 'fleeted the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world': with tennis and cricket, impromptu dances and (best of all) water parties, supper picnics beside the river, return on the ebb with laughter, halts and challenges to the hills' echo by Wiseman's Stone, soft choruses sometimes muted to a twilight mood and to the rhythm of oars that dipped into pools of phosphorescence and dripped beads of fire between the strokes. 'Yes, yes', the reader may be moved to interrupt; 'most of us have been that way in our time and have known whither it leads.' In one respect, however, my experience may differ from his. At the age of thirty (as will be told) fate and choice in their degrees brought me back to the river beside which my home has been for these fifty years: in the course of which

Queens have died young and fair

and gentle maids become grandmothers, some few of these having married into the country around. When I meet these old ladies at social functions it would (I think) please them to know that I still see them young and fair and, at night a frequent dreamer, am from time to time haunted by a vision of them not referable to actual memory, moving in beves and clusters on a green lawn in frocks of sprigged muslin under wide floral hats and sunshades of all bright colours, with neck and shoulder scarves that lift or float in a light breeze as they meet, part, draw together again:

Car la vie est faite et défaite
Comme un bouquet aux mains d'une fille.

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Among the branches of learning fostered by our ancient Universities are two priceless ones they omit to advertise, yet might have been specially designed to promote—friendship, by life in College and, by their Long Vacations, first love.

But *la vie est faite et dé faite*.... In the late summer of '85 I had lodgings at the Ferry Inn, Bodinnick, on the eastern shore of Fowey Harbour; with food and drink, airy bedroom, parlour and balcony—all for a weekly sum so derisory as in these days to underpass belief. One evening, after dinner at the close of a day on the river, I had spent on my balcony watching the sunset, the ferry crossing until twilight deepened; then the men moored up the horse-boat and the tramp of their heavy boots up the hill warned me bedwards.

The Ferry Inn runs its level away back alongside the village street, which climbs so steeply that the floor of my bedroom window at the rear of the building measured but a yard or so above a low separating wall. At about 4 a.m. I became drowsily aware of a tapping against the open casement, then a hoarse voice summoning 'Master Arthur, Master Arthur!'

I jumped from bed. In the semi-darkness below, with one foot on the low wall, carriage whip in hand, stood our groom, Richard Mullins.

'Is that you, Master Arthur?... Then you're wanted home at once. Your father's had a stroke.'

I huddled on my clothes. He had roused up a boatman on the other side and we recrossed to the Passage Slip, where the old mare, Jessie, waited in the dog-cart; without touch of whip she started at a fierce trot, and we drove homeward through the dawn.

Arriving, I found my father undressed and abed, alive but unconscious and breathing heavily, my mother watching. The doctor had left and she had dismissed the others to their rooms to sleep as they could. By daybreak some improvement showed; audible speech returned (though

incoherent) with restless movement of the limbs. Thereafter for a week or two we all tended him, my sisters helping by day, my mother and I taking turns by night, since in those days the training of private nurses had scarcely been invented. Very gradually his condition, physical and mental, improved and gave hope of a complete recovery: during which time a craving more and more possessed him to arrange his notes and compose the Preface for a book on *The Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall*.¹ He would sit for long at this task: writing slowly at times with a firm grip on his subject and quite lucidly: but in a while the sentences would tail off into rambling incoherence, and with a helpless, lost look, sign to us to lead him back to his room. Physically he appeared to have gained so much ground as to warrant my return to the Ferry for the fag-end of the Vacation. After a few days, however, an alarm called me back, to find him in a coma in which he quietly sank to death. In an earlier chapter I have quoted a sentence of his father on his character, and I, as his son, can echo it.

I was now left the head of our house with my mother, two sisters, and two young brothers of school age and no income—a grim prospect, though mercifully not so grim at the moment as it afterwards proved to be. My mother's father had owned a fair estate. It had been depleted through generosity to her and to others; but she was his only child. He at once came forward to help, and in consultation was instant that I should continue at Oxford and read for my degree: for without that what qualifications had I for any post above that of under-master in some country Grammar School? To be frank, I believe we both

¹ Some years later my sisters Mabel and Lilian Quiller Couch undertook a pious pilgrimage of several months to these sacred springs, the number of which swelled from about forty in the original MS. to more than ninety before the list was completed. All these they visited, and the report of their condition (in 1891) 'may be relied on as being that of an eye-witness' (*Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall*, London, Charles J. Clarke, 1894). The little book contains most of my father's Preface here alluded to, and some reproductions of his delicate sketches in water colour.

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nursed an unspoken hope of my adding a first in Greats to my first in Moderations with a Fellowship to follow.

It was not to be nor can I even plead that anxiety over affairs at home distracted or seriously interfered with my reading. Indeed, I read pretty hard, but still under the delusion that a creditable performer in philosophy might let his ancient history more or less take care of itself. When it came to the Schools, however, I found this to be an error 'and upon me proved'. My philosophy papers indeed were such that one of the examiners incautiously confided to a friend that mine was 'a first, hands down': and when it came to the *Viva* the two philosophers at the table gave me a twenty-five minutes of discussion so serious yet lively as almost to resemble a 'three-cornered duel' of dialectic among equals (save the mark!). I could not guess that their condescension came of a desire to impress my merit upon the two historians who had listened, no doubt, impatiently. When it came to their turn one question sufficed—'What was the feeling in the provincial towns when Caesar had crossed the Rubicon?'—to which after a pause I answered, 'Well, at first they hardly knew which way to turn.' (And I will bet I was right, whatever the history books may say.) 'Thank you. That will do, Sir, Good morning!'

Had I known it at the time, I might, as I descended the marble staircase to the High, have bethought me, as a *mot d'escalier* of Brougham's account of the Scottish Peers in the Dundas crisis. 'They knew not whither to turn. Perhaps it might be yet more truly said, that they knew not *when* to turn.'

The historians prevailed, and rightly: for, after all, the Oxford School of *Literae Humaniores* would scarcely have earned its acknowledged repute had not its inventors pretty thoroughly understood what they were about. None the less it gave me some pleasure (tinged with amusement) long years later when shortly before his death the late Dr Samuel Alexander, O.M., in a semi-official letter

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commending a certain ex-pupil to my notice, took occasion to remind me in a postscript to recall our encounter in 1886 across the blue cloth and to add his lasting regret at having lost the fight for my first.

The blow to my prospects was serious, although the recently elected President (the Rev. H. G. Woods of blessed memory) and Fellows of Trinity promptly did their best to soften it by electing me to a College lectureship in Classics. But on my spirits, oddly enough, the disappointment fell lightly, so lightly as to astonish myself: and this because, as I see it now, I had for some time been unconsciously determining my purpose in life—my hope at any rate—that, if fame could be won by me, I would win it as a writer; indeed had been unconsciously preparing for that which now took shape as a firm resolve: and as men incline to signify their resolves by some token or other, so I had one to my hand.

On the morning of the examination I had provided myself in Mr Thornton's shop across the High with a few steel nibs and a cork penholder costing twopence or twopence-halfpenny. This I now addressed—as Thucydides might put it—somewhat in the following words: 'Well you and I have just made a mess of things. So it's for you and me together to make amends.' With this same penholder I have written all my stories, essays, lectures, verse, etc., as with it I am writing this page. In these fifty-odd years it has many times fallen or been swept off the writing-table and disastrously, being of cork and brittle; has had the fracture mended and covered with one, two, three silver bands, until there was no help but to case it in silver complete. Within that case, it may be, all is now a powder of dust, the slave anticipating by a little the fate of its master and their common handiwork. The reader, anyhow, will pardon this note on a long attachment.

The disposal of my father's collection of Cornish relics, and a great part of his library, enabled me to remove the

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family to Oxford to a small house in St Margaret's Road. Thence my brothers attended the Oxford High School as day-boys before going their ways in life; and there, some fifteen years later, my mother died.

In the midst of these domestic affairs another blow fell. I had snatched a few days respite at Fowey when a letter reached me from my grandfather Ford, asking me to meet him at Plymouth 'on serious business'. I obeyed, and there after luncheon, during which his silence kept me guessing, we sat for some time on a public bench on the Hoe before he could command his voice to break to me that he was almost a ruined man, having lost the residue of his estate in a vain attempt to rescue an elder brother's fortunes from shipwreck. For himself (a widower now) he had salved just enough to keep him in decent comfort for the rest of his days. It was still for us, however, not for himself, that he thought after spending over long years so much of his hope and his substance on his only child and her children; in particular for me, into whose hands he was abandoning a seemingly hopeless responsibility. The first charge upon this was obviously to comfort him, which I tried to do then and there, and take no credit for, the immediate effect on myself being a challenge with a reaction of reckless confidence. Grown man beside man we returned to the station where I saw him into his train and took my own back to Fowey, carrying my recklessness with me.

That same evening I asked the lady of my affection to be my wife.

It was mad no doubt. It would have been wicked had I not started by making a clean breast of the odds against me. Let it be enough to say here that, as I write, looking back over fifty-odd years, I can declare that hour the most fortunate of my life. We had halted half-way in a short lane leading up from the sea and beside a low wall coped by a quantity of wild thyme, on a tuft of which I rested a hand as I spoke and waited for her answer. To this day, halting

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before a tuft of the plant I press it and it recalls that answer in its fragrance.

Difficult times lay ahead: but to distract me from anxieties that should in all conscience have been dark, there came, a day or two later through the kind but unguessed offices of a friend, the offer of a holiday tutorship to fill up the gap before my return to Oxford. It was from Lord Leconfield at Petworth, to read Classics with his elder son George O'Brien Wyndham, then on vacation from Eton. I shall have more to tell of Petworth in my next section: but one item belongs to this section and may properly conclude it. Not in the least knowing what kind of animal would present himself as the new tutor, with commendable prudence Lady Leconfield had engaged rooms for me at the Half Moon just outside the park gates. To these on the first morning, after two hours spent on the pleasantest terms with my pupil, I returned; there set out a quire of virgin folio paper, and sat down to write the first chapter of my first novel.

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V

PETWORTH

MORE than a year before, in my lodgings over Cadgwith, I had planned the start of romance with that coast for its background, taking its first suggestion from a small book on the neighbouring parish of Mullyon by its Vicar, the Reverend E. G. Harvey—or rather from a passage in it concerning the wreck of a Dutch barque, the *Jonkheer*, Meester van de Wall van Puttershoek (650 tons register), homeward bound from Batavia, against the cliffs by Polurrian on the night of March 25th, 1867. She had been observed the previous afternoon, clawing off the shore of Mount's Bay, missing stays and altogether behaving in a manner so unhandy as to suggest serious disorder on board; and the one survivor, a Greek sailor, swore at the inquest that he had joined the ship at Batavia, but did not know her name or the name of her captain! (Nor did it add to the credibility of this that the remnants of his clothing included a lady's gold watch and chain.) On the morrow of the inquest he disappeared: and meanwhile the Coroner's jury managed to add to the mystery, in the absence of any wreckage identifying the *Jonkheer*, by finding that she was another vessel altogether, the *Kosmopoliet*. Their verdict reaching Falmouth, certain skippers of Dutchmen at anchor there shook their heads. 'No, this cannot be the *Kosmopoliet*. She will not be due for weeks. This must be Klaas Lammerts' ship, the *Jonkheer*.' So it proved to be, the *Kosmopoliet* arriving at Falmouth some weeks later, safe and sound, and the true identity meanwhile discovered by markings on the underclothing of corpses washed ashore—

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these for the most part of women passengers traced as having shipped on the *Jonkheer* at Batavia.

Well, here obviously was the start for a story ready for the romancer's hand; and sometimes in later years, taking up *Dead Man's Rock*, I have sighed to think what a capital tale could have been built on it. But I was inexpert; and, as Aristotle noted long ago, 'plot' presents the difficult first of a beginner's fences. It had baffled my inventing, at any rate, and so obstinately that I recall the very hour and spot when and where the plot seemed of a sudden to take shape and relief came. (I mention this triviality merely to encourage some tiro who may happen on this page, and I say 'seemed' because it turned out to be in part an illusion after all.) In the previous spring I had paid a farewell visit to Bodmin, and spent much of my time re-tracing my old walks. One of these had taken me to the banks of the Camel river in which I had learnt to swim and to practise fishing. Returning in the late twilight to Bodmin whither, after passing the little village of Nanstallon, the road climbs between high Cornish hedges, these happened to be illuminated by sheet upon sheet of glow-worms. Half-way up the hill I halted to peer closely; in a flash the puzzle that had been teasing my afternoon's walk dissolved itself. I saw, at any rate, the first half of the story clearly mapped out; and now in my lodging at the Half Moon I wrote away at the early chapters with a cheerful confidence of youth and inexperience.

I shall speak later of the friends I made at Petworth, but must say a word here of my pupil George O'Brien Wyndham, Lord Leconfield's elder son and the heir; and two more different characters, while each in its way admirable, I have seldom met: the father being a born aristocrat, famous shot, master and owner of two packs of hounds;¹

¹ It was told me that he never rode at a fence (the report being that he held his life too precious). On one occasion, finding the field in a bunch before an unusually daunting one, he put his horse at it and cleared it nonchalantly.

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the son on the whole averse from 'sport', gentle and contemplative, though neither priggish nor in the least unmanly; the father, again (as his brother-in-law, Lord Rosebery, long afterwards described him to me), one of these addicts to field sports who consider Education of first importance for anyone who is not—which is why, perhaps, George underwent a tutor on his holidays from Eton. Looking back on the boy's all-too-brief career, I have sometimes recalled a passage in M. Maeterlinck's *Les Avertis*, the foredoomed who die young:

Ils sont étranges. Ils semblent plus près de la vie que les autres enfants et de rien soupçonner, et cependant leurs yeux ont une certitude si profonde, qu'il faut qu'ils sachent tout et qu'ils aient eu plus d'un soir le temps de se dire leur secret... A la hâte sagement et minutieusement ils se préparent à vivre, et cette hâte est le signe que les mères, à leur insu discrètes confidentes de tout ce qui ne se dit pas, osent à peine regarder.

I do not, of course, nor shall ever know, if such apprehension haunted Lady Leconfield; but even then, beneath her Scotswoman's reserve, I seemed to detect a yearning passion for her firstborn, answered by his for her.

Some of these 'predestined' there are (says Maeterlinck) who

s'attardent un peu, nous regardent en souriant attentivement, semblent sur le point d'avouer qu'ils ont tout compris, et puis, vers la vingtième année, s'éloignent à la hâte, en étouffant leurs pas, comme s'ils venaient de découvrir qu'ils s'étaient trompés de demeure et qu'ils allaient passer leur vie parmi des hommes qu'ils ne connaissent pas.

Thus while intellectually sensitive (even supra-sensitive, as I came to discover) in many respects, in others, to which clever boys are usually attracted, George Wyndham showed no curiosity. No one ever heard of his visiting the great library high up in the house, collected by his grandfather the Earl of Egremont and containing among other treasures the famous 'Petworth' Chaucer written on vellum; as no one ever met him (or anyone for that matter)

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in the Picture Gallery downstairs—also a hobby of the Earl's, who, as a famous Regency buck, emulated the pose of his royal Master and *convive* as a Patron of the Arts. The pictures assembled here would be reckoned nowadays a 'mixed bag' yet testified to a discriminating taste: and the great house contained the well-known landscapes of Petworth Park painted by Turner on commission, besides noble portraits, and in the dining-room some exquisite carving by Grinling Gibbons. Of these, as of his home's exquisite surroundings, he was (so far as I detected) quite unobservant. Yet a line of Virgil could move him well-nigh to tears, and a first glimpse of Plato affected him much as a child might be dazzled by the light of an unfamiliar doorway half-open and surmise a wonderful world within. First and last his most winning attraction operated through his evident instinct to take you on trust and think well of you. Our liking had established itself within an hour; at the end of which my way back to the Half Moon led past a lodge gate, its cottage banked with the scented yellow musk, in those days the pride of innumerable low-roofed dwellings throughout the land. As I passed, the innumerable flowers were yielding their full fragrance to the sun's heat. The scent, save in memory, can be enjoyed now by no one since, by some caprice, it left the world almost in a day, and growers seek in vain to recapture it. May be, like *les avertis*, it stole away having discovered that it had mistaken this world for dwelling-place.

Along with the family at the great house I found a number of new friends in Petworth—Blagdons, Daintrees, Dr and Mrs Eardley Wilmot—few of them to-day surviving and constant, others constant while life lasted, the rest by the currents of life dispersed. But most of them were resident and welcomed me when the Leconfields invited me again to be George's holiday tutor. But in August and September 1887 I was happy enough there to forget the heavy cloud ahead. A growing interest in the

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story growing under my hands; the exhilaration of young love accepted and returned; the sense of vindicating this by standing up to giants and challenging them (for fuller illustration of which the reader may turn to a chapter of *David Copperfield*); afternoon walks alone with day-dreaming beside the little river Rother: after-dinner evenings in that late hot summer of 1886, when a company would gather and sit on shawls—the men overcoat-less, the ladies with but the lightest of scarves to cover their shoulders—and ‘tired the sun’ with talk and laughter, while distant heath fires beyond the Sussex Weald or away by Bognor brightened as twilight deepened; all these happenings recollected, blend after almost sixty years in the mirror of Petworth and of a time when

at the rainbow’s foot lay surely gold
And hope felt strong, and life itself not weak.

At the beginning of the October term I went back to Oxford and started to practise the art of lecturing, my subjects Virgil and Aristophanes. These two authors being favourites of mine, I tried to communicate my delight in them rather than to discuss niceties of textual criticism, in which to be sure I was no expert scholar: and can hope my class enjoyed those hours if but half so well as I did. Let me pass over this, however, to tell of a sharp lesson I myself learned. My Aristophanes class included a ‘sprig of the nobility’, if I may borrow a favourite term of the novelists of that period, though it badly fits an offshoot who in fact was tough (in more than one sense), tall and bulky, and most of us wondered how Trinity had come to admit him, unless through the influence of his kinsfolk, some of whom were, or had been, eminent in the state. He was a ‘bad hat’ anyhow, and ran a roulette table in his lodgings to amuse the callow and unwary. One morning I had laid my Aristophanes on a window seat in the beautiful Old Bursary, and was turning to it to follow the text while an

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undergraduate translated, when this fellow confided audibly to two or three near him an offensive remark about me. I swung round instantly and ordered him to leave the room. A nasty half-minute followed as he heaved himself out of his chair, a mass of a man, and faced me defiantly with a sneer. 'Leave the room' I repeated. He glanced round, realised (I suppose) that opinion was against him, turned on his heel, and muttering, shuffled out. I hope that, had the tension lasted a few moments longer, I should have come to my senses, dismissed the class and walked out myself, to report him later. But I was young, and for the instant black with rage, and I narrate the small incident for its cautionary moral: 'Never utter a command or a threat unless confident you can enforce it.' I never reported the man, who very soon afterwards removed his name, or had it removed, from the College's books.

I had been forced to lay *Dead Man's Rock* aside for the time: but had shown the half-written story (the only MS. of mine on which I have ever taken counsel) to our Bursar, Bob Raper, fine scholar and friend of young aspirants whatever their serious ambition. He encouraged me to finish it; and accordingly in the next Easter Vacation, in the 'Windy Parlour' at Wastdale Head I sat down to this. But unhappily the first flush of invention had faded, and I fear me the conclusion worked itself out in a huddle of violence much like the Fifth Act of a bad Elizabethan play, even of some good ones. The book's own fate, however, proved happier than that of the victims my invention had sacrificed. Raper commended it to Mr Lyttelton Gell, Secretary of the Clarendon Press, and formerly literary supervisor of Messrs Cassell, Petter and Galpin's (now Cassells') publishing house of La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill. That famous firm had recently broken new ground with *Treasure Island* and *King Solomon's Mines*, a rapid success which they possibly hoped to repeat with this new

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tale by a new author. At any rate they took *Dead Man's Rock* at once, and so the reader will be spared the too customary account of early struggle, rejected MSS., hopes deferred. Of other struggles—Heaven knows that spared me this—I had plenty at the time, but again forgot them in the joyous atmosphere of my second tutorship at Petworth and the expectation of seeing my name—or rather, initial—on cover and title-page of a real book. The G.P.O., to be sure, administered a small dose of hope deferred by spiriting the parcel away on wanderings in a wrong direction, and when it arrived old Lord Leconfield, who had come to take pleasure in my conversation (or, to speak more accurately, in my capacity as a listener) reproached me with wasting on fiction a talent that might earn a considerable income at the bar. He did not know, of course, that apart from disinclination I had peremptory reasons forbidding that adventure: so I took comfort in a letter from Cassells' editor announcing that the book had begun to sell 'like hot cakes'. The early reviews, too, were kinder than it deserved....

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